

# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS MONTHLY MAGAZINE<sup>©</sup>

#46



# **Shadows of Centralis Monthly Magazine: Issue #46 (February 2026)**

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Issue: #46 (February 2026)

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Hello and welcome, one and all, to the February 2026 issue of Shadows of Centralis Monthly Magazine, the essential old school publication for players of Space Battles and Shadows of Centralis, as well as enthusiasts of pulp and the golden age of fantasy, science fiction, and horror.

First of all, we are delighted to announce a brand new collaboration between Wombat Wargames and world-renowned fantasy artist Ian Miller! Each adorned with cover artwork by the legendary illustrator, this year will see the release of a very special series of books which celebrate the works of one of weird writing's greatest pensmiths. For more details, see this month's Latest News article!

Sound the trumpets, beat the drums! This month's magazine has a trove of treasures for readers to enjoy! Sure to be of particular interest to players of Shadows of Centralis, we have several short stories and lore pieces to enjoy. For those drawn to the classic horror and fantasy works of yesteryear, this month's Coffee Mutterings article covers M.R. James, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, Mervyn Peake, and Lord Dunsany. All this and more awaits discovery in the pages ahead!

Huzzah!

*John Wombat*



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# RETRO RULESETS

## PREMIUM PULP PUBLICATIONS

**Wombat Wargames:** Fusing old-school rules mechanics with innovative new features, while drawing on literary and aesthetical inspiration from the classic age of weird fiction and pulp publications, Wombat Wargames is an independent publisher of wargaming rules, books, and magazines. In homage to the wonderful wargaming and pulp worlds of yesteryear, every one of our A5-sized publications have a distinctive and unashamedly old-school feel to them.



Making our products available for worldwide purchase via Amazon, as well as specially selected stockists, while working with some of the best figures in the wargaming hobby, Wombat Wargames offer retro-inspired, high-quality products. Among our most recently released titles are Space Battles: A Spacefarers Guide, Shadows of Centralis (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition), Pulp Fiends Volume I: Seabury Quinn, Starfarer: An Authorised Biography of Poul Anderson (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), Poul Anderson Collected Works: Volumes I & II, Wargaming Interviews: Volumes I, II & III, and Blanche: The Rise of Grimdark.

**Monthly Magazine:** Released on the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month, Shadows of Centralis Monthly Magazine is an A5-sized, 114-page, full colour, premium paperback magazine which covers Wombat Wargames' flagship system, Shadows of Centralis, along with Space Battles, the exciting retro-fuelled spaceship tabletop wargame by world-renowned rulesmith, Rick Priestley. Including detailed interviews, we regularly feature a host of wargaming personalities. Further to this, as we champion the golden age of pulp publications, the monthly magazine also includes special features on classic science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

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**Casting shadows most hideous  
upon the moonlit streets, the  
beast stalked its prey...**



**SHADOWS  
OF CENTRALIS**  
WOMBAT WARGAMES®



# WOMBAT WARGAMES: LATEST NEWS

## Wombat Wargames, Ian Miller & H.P. Lovecraft!

We are delighted to announce an exciting new collaboration between Wombat Wargames and legendary fantasy artist Ian Miller. Over the course of 2026, Wombat Wargames will be releasing a very special series of H.P. Lovecraft books, each of which will be adorned with Lovecraft cover artwork by Ian Miller! Set for release at the end of February 2026, the first volume in this collection includes thirty poems, one essay, one letter, and fifteen short stories. Full release details of this book, as well as a deeper look into this unique series as a whole, will feature in next month's issue of *Shadows of Centralis Monthly Magazine*.

*“And as I writhe in my guilty agony, frantic to save the city whose peril every moment grows, and vainly striving to shake off this unnatural dream of a house of stone and brick south of a sinister swamp and a cemetery on a low hillock; the Pole Star, evil and monstrous, leers down from the black vault, winking hideously like an insane watching eye which strives to convey some strange message, yet recalls nothing save that it once had a message to convey.”*

Taken from *Polaris* by H.P. Lovecraft, first published in 1920.

# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: R'LYEH ACOLYTE OF ROOTH

Casting a steely, unblinking eye across the foamy, white-laced waves, with salty sea air stinging like a swarm of hornets his bruised and lacerated face and hands, R'lyeh, Acolyte of Rooth considered the absolute destruction he and his warriors had left behind. It had been without mercy or hesitation that the Servants of Extinction had slain those before them, saving only a few dozen



soldiers who were later nailed to his ships' masts; their deaths painfully drawn out, they were gruesome, crow-pecked decorations designed to instil a nauseating fear in future enemies.

Not content to simply defeat the defending force of the Konstrato Empire in combat, R'lyeh wanted to crush the enemy, to remove all traces of them, and had ordered the complete razing of the coastal outpost. Such was the intensity of the flames, fuelled as much by fanatical enthusiasm for the cause as the use of many barrels of oil, plumes of thick black smoke served as a message for miles around of R'lyeh's intentions to wreak havoc in neighbouring lands.

Below deck, in chambers misted with incense and the murmuring of prayers, many warriors were being treated by apothecaries. Of those who had made the ultimate sacrifice, R'lyeh felt a strange sense of envy; his fallen warriors had now transcended the limitations of

physical form and had ascended to Rooth's Palace of Solace. Now with their goddess, with soul purified and mind cleansed, and with their committed atrocities forming no part of their memories, the slain Servants of Extinction warriors now lived a supernatural life of eternal fulfilment.

Returning to his sleeping quarters, R'Iyeh drank deeply from an ornate green glass bottle which had been resting on the floor of his bedside. As the vinegary tones of the papaver somniferum-based wine washed down his throat, R'Iyeh lay back on his bed, closed his eyes and entered into strange, euphoric dreams. Until he himself entered through the gates of the Palace of Solace, such dreams would be his consolation.



**“SPARE NONE. DESTROY ALL.  
ASCEND TO PARADISE.”**

DOCTRINE OF EXTINCTION.

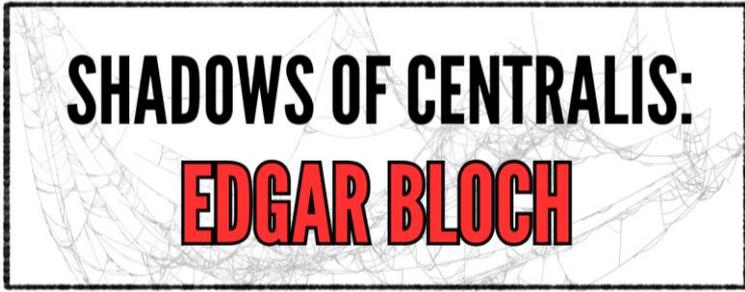
# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: GLORY TO ENDOVELICUS

“Glory to Endovelicus, the Orb’s true saviour, bastion of light, and beacon of purity. It is with the belief of the Orb’s one true god emboldening my heart, and with my body purified through birching and days of fasting, that I finally feel able to put quill to parchment and to tell of the Church’s encounter along the outskirts of Sandor...

With putrefaction seeming to leech into neighbouring lands, the unhallowed air a choking, acrid odour of such repulsive intensity that a number of our party were overcome with fits of convulsion, the cancer that is the realm of Sandor grows. Like fallen fruit mouldering under the greed of the worm, the lands we travelled were in a state of semi-decay, all around there was a feeling of foreboding doom. But the bleakness and burgeoning of corruption of the paths we journeyed cannot compare to the beasts which stalk these lands...

Such were the monsters we came upon, such was the breathtaking terror they inspired within us, I fear my words will not fully impress the true ungodly horror we suffered. Some lumbering with unnatural defiance of death, others seemingly reinvigorated by a nightmare rebirth, their bloodless veins pulsating with a sickeningly vitality, the creatures held the foulest countenances. Some leered with eyeless sockets, others stared through crow-pecked pupils, but all made the most base, guttural moaning of obvious hatred for life. Groans became barks as lungless parodies of man, their flesh mingled with tattered rags, their hides a mass of writhing maggots, became aware of our presence... But, as we know, fire purifies the soul...”

Taken from diaries for the ‘Bestiary of the Orb’ by Venerated Acolyte of the Church of Endovelicus, Kier Knud.



# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS:

## EDGAR BLOCH

"I starved my body. I let my blood. I chastised my flesh...

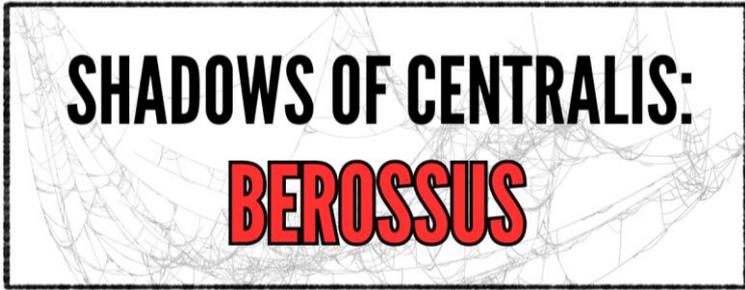
In paroxysms of agony, reduced to mere knees, my hands shook but I gouged out my eyes for fear their faces, sickening, twisted parodies of man, leering and corrupted, were burned into my retinas. Still, relentless, without break, the pictures of them stalk my mind like a festering plague. These images do not cease, they run without end and sear my being.

As blood bleached my head, running down my face, as the metallic tones of the liquid seeped between my lips to trickle down my own throat, I destroyed my hearing for the echoes of their unholy and repugnant calls haunted my every moment. Still, their sounds abound. These blasphemous calls colour my mind, sounds without volume, yet more deafening a cacophony than my soul can bear.

With serrated blade, my gritted teeth breaking, unable to quell the continued nauseating aroma of fetid entrails writhing with bloated maggots which permeated my olfactory senses, I removed my nose. Yet, still, my stomach retches. I am forever tainted with the vile energy of decay, the nausea of undeath chokes me, it looks to consume me.

I hear the whispers of Barnabas, he seeks my soul. He eyes my death as a rebirth of darkness, but he shall not be the victor, I shall not live eternally as a rotting puppet of a vile soul stealer. There is but one path open to me, as Endovelicus teaches, "fire purifies the soul." I offer my cleansed soul to my god, Endovelicus... "

Taken from final writings of Edgar Bloch, Acolyte of the Church of Endovelicus.



# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: **BEROSSUS**

“To his followers on the Orb, the Lords, a semi-human faction whose unhallowed domain of Futurm Terras rings with the amplified readings of his insane teachings, Berossus is a saviour eternal, a cosmic superbeing sent from the far future of tomorrow to lead them out of their torturous existence of today. Considered thusly, his sycophantic servants, shadows of humanity with bodies crudely butchered to incorporate technology, considering themselves blessed, are blind to the vagaries of madness in which Berossus is lost.

A supernatural force awash with the chaos of insanity, for Berossus, his spiritual realm is both his escape and encasement; an esoteric fusion which has strangled the god’s mind and form. As they desire to mirror their master, his followers are blind to their bodies and minds corrupting and weakening; instead of seeing their own derangement and physical failings, they frantically strive to perfect anatomical advancements as technology is considered sacred. For the Lords, to be at one with machine is to be closer to their god.

If filtered, if his madness was not such an inherent part of him, the amassed knowledge of Berossus would rival that of the Greater Beings. Instead, like the wretched abominations which make up his flock, astute observations and wisdom have given way to crazed ideas and unhinged delusions.

Much can be learned from Berossus, not through his teachings, though; lessons are to be taken from the dangers of mind expansion without caution. Knowledge can be illimitable, but one cleaves a double-edged sword. Advancements can force regression.”

Taken from ‘Liber Lucis’ by Arch Seeker, Magus.

# **SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: BLESSED ARE THE DAMNED**

Under the gleaming, gibbous moon of a lugubrious sky strangely devoid of starlight, like a raging epidemic ravaging the jolting corpse of its choking host, headed by units of multi-armed, misshapen Mutants, the massed Damned force relentlessly pressed forward against the beleaguered army of Dwarfs. Amidst a cloud of black powder and sound of echoing thunder, as Dwarf Gunners discharged their firearms into the ranks of the Damned's troops, with musket balls tearing through their coarse hides, unwavering in their focus, the units of Mutants continued to surge onwards. Swearing vengeance for their fallen brethren, calling out loudly their praise to their god T'Zor, the Mutants further quickened their pace as they powered towards the gun-toting enemy.

Like a pack of rabid dogs, snarling with rage and spitting hatred, the Mutants launched themselves into the line of defending dwarfs. Using their muskets as makeshift clubs, now forced into close combat, the outnumbered unit of Dwarf Gunners battled tenaciously to hold back the frenzied Damned fighters. Though noted for their determined spirit, the doughty dwarfs were no match for the swarming, crazed Mutants. Hacking at the Dwarf Gunners with their ill-kempt but effective swords and axes, while absorbing blows with their solid shields, the Mutants made short work of their foe.

Having ripped a hole in the Dwarfs' first line of defence, bloodied and panting but fuelled with driving vengeance, as they eyed the large block of Dwarf Warriors ahead of them, knowing their fate against such a unit likely to be defeat, the Mutants again called their praises to T'Zor and charged forward. As they pounded towards the steely-eyed Dwarf Warriors, fearless of death, the Mutants felt euphorically victorious. With the dwarven outpost now breached, the teeming

horde of the Damned that followed would overwhelm the dispossessed Dwarfs. The Mutants knew that their lives would be avenged, while their place in T'Zor's heavenly realm awaited them. Running towards death, weapons raised, throwing themselves into the fray for the final time, the Mutants would at least take some Dwarf Warriors with them.

\*\*\*\*\*

As the pair of enormous, disease-ridden rats raced towards the lumbering unit of Zombies, pulling their heavy wooden chariot which carried two bellowing Mutant crewmen, they squealed with a chittering delight. Launching themselves into the mindless swarm of fetid fiends, the vicious rats clawed and bit with a



savage fury as they looked to tear the rotting unit apart. As the gigantic rodents tore away at the enemy, the two Mutant crewman of the chariot likewise hacked away furiously with their swords and axes. Two Zombies quickly fell, their maggot-infested bodies mangled to a sickening pulp. Though less than fearsome fighters individually, massed units of Zombies can often overpower opponents through a sheer weight of numbers, while these creatures of the night arm themselves with all manner of makeshift, wicked weapons. Amidst a confusion of blows and chaos of bodies, one charioteer failed to shield himself from a striking Zombie, as the vile beast thrust its aged and rusted blade through the stomach of the Mutant. As soon as the slain crewman hit the ground, several Zombies pounced upon and tore away at the corpse, butchering and feasting on the misshapen Damned warrior. Seeing his comrade fall, the remaining crewman fought with increased vigour, stoically preventing the Zombies unit from advancing towards the Damned's sacred hill.

**“HE IS US. WE ARE HIM.  
OUR VENGEANCE IS BOUNDLESS.”**

TAKEN FROM 'THE BOOK OF T'ZOR' BY MASTER SCRIBE AND CHIEF  
ADVISOR TO THE COURT OF THE DAMNED, RUPERT THE REPULSIVE.

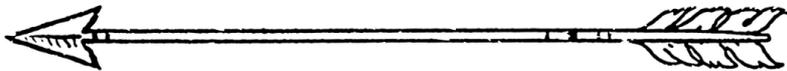
Positioned on the weathered brow of an ancient hill, using the battered and defiled remnants of a long-abandoned chapel of the Konstrato Empire as cover, the Mutant crew of the ballista had a panoramic view of the war unfolding. They had expected their Damned army to encounter a large force of the Konstrato Empire, but laid out before them was an immense army of epic proportions. Huge, snaking lines of musketeers and crossbowmen advanced defiantly forward, while supported by rank upon rank of dependable spearmen and elite swordsmen.

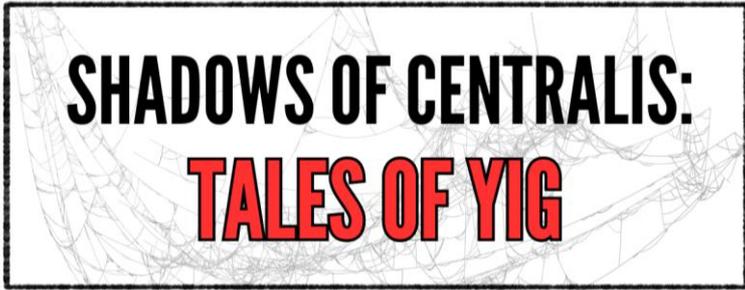


Meanwhile, atop mighty, cantering warhorses which neighed and whinnied, eager to gallop, armed with flaming lances, large units of Purging Beacons were positioned to the force's flanks.

Adjusting the machine's aim, the Mutants slightly tilted the creaking ballista so that its reach would stretch further; they were targeting the Purging Beacons on the left flank of the advancing Konstrato Empire army. Once lined up, with the machine's straining bowstring drawn back, the misshapen creatures loaded the ballista with a huge, heavy glass ball. A thick slapping sound then emanated from the machine as its lever was thrown and its load catapulted.

Reflecting the sun's beaming light with a sickly, disease-yellow iridescence, the projected load arced through the air with elegant menace, before smashing into the frontline of the Purging Beacons. As the massive glass ball shattered against the body of a horseman, taking him forcefully from his steed and leaving him in a broken and lacerated mess upon the muddied ground, shards of glass peppered his comrades and their steeds, puncturing them like a volley of arrows, while a tar-like liquid of disease, now free of its casing, saturated the stunned troops.





# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: TALES OF YIG

Adding to the labours of the marching warriors, exhausted but elated following their hard-fought victory over the first of the Orcs' waves of attack, the air carried a stiflingly warm and energy-sapping wind which had been brought over from across the Sea of Buffo. Resulting in frustratingly poor visibility, while producing a chokingly unpleasant acrid smell, the sweltering wind picked up a thick dust which limited visibility, prompting the fighters to feel vulnerable from potential ambushers. Meanwhile, pregnant with dark clouds which verged on pitch-black, the sky seemed mocking; showing an abundance of water which could quell the claustrophobic heat and clear the dusty haze, but the sky preferred to hold its liquid for itself.

Wearing a partial suit of heavy, filth encrusted, rust-ravaged, battered and bloodied armour which had long since fused with his own diseased and discoloured flesh, forming a fetid encasement of protection, Yig eyed the lugubrious landscape which would serve as the arena for the next conflict; Yig expected at least two further assaults from the Orcs. Wielding an ancient but mighty, two-handed, rune-etched sword which had claimed the lives of countless foes, resulting in its supernaturally whispering blade being stained a permanent dirty crimson, Yig was leading his Damned brethren into battle once more.

An exalted champion of the Damned, a Key of Damnation, Yig had received special blessings from T'Zor, for whom he had been a loyal and devout servant. Gifted to him by his god, his beloved spiritual father, in addition to the bone white, tusk-like horns which grew from both sides of his already disfigured head, Yig now possessed three eyes. His additional, oversized ocular organ, a luminously coloured leprous yellow which was always observing, was rooted squarely in his

sore-covered forehead. Though covered in a thick film of sticky puss, with its lens writhing with infection, this supernatural eye allowed for an otherworldly sharp focus.

\*\*\*\*\*

Having travelled far from the Damned's domain of Sanctuarium Ultionis, avoiding the attention of the Konstrato Empire, while pockets of Goblins observed them from a distance, Yig's troops had already defeated one force of Orcs as they headed for central Coelum; it was here where Yig had been tasked with constructing a shrine to T'Zor. The Court of the Damned, with urging from the Daughters of Disease, had ordered this expedition; the Orb was to pay witness to the Damned's praise of their god. The governing group of the Damned knew, as well did Yig, that it was unlikely the troops would return. The importance of this expedition lay in the message, both to their saviour T'Zor, as well as the other inhabitants of the Orb.

Yig was under no illusions that his forces lacked the proficiency, training and discipline of traditional soldiers, but he saw a higher value in his legion of lepers and corrupted beings. Indeed, in their victory over the Orcs, they had proven themselves to be a formidable foe; Yig felt honoured to lead them. He knew that the remaining stalking Orcs still likely dismissed his Damned troops as no more than a ragtag assortment of misshapen menaces, though the swinish race would perhaps now be reconsidering the Damned's fighting prowess given their first victory.

Yig's force comprised the Orb's unwanted; they were sickly, diseased, mutated, shunned and shamed, maimed and maligned, many of his number had been deemed insane by standard society. Unified through persecution, and with their sicknesses strengthening them as T'Zor blessed their bodies and souls with his dark gifts, the bonds his Damned brethren held with one another saw them give no quarter in battle, while the thought of retreating was alien to them. Yig knew that each and every warrior under his charge would sooner fall to the blade of the enemy than lose a conflict; the Damned were the children of the great god T'Zor, and their father's vengeance was boundless.

# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: OGRE MARCH

Beneath a morning sky of murky grey dappled with blood-orange, as pregnant clouds threatened a downpouring of rain and the air hung heavy with a stifling, slightly acrid, humidity, the in-step sound of well-disciplined marching echoed loudly between the moss-adorned walls of the steep mountain path.

Hulking humanoids armed with huge hand weapons, their forms bestrewn with a sinewy muscularity, rank upon rank of Ogre Warriors marched to the driving beat of the leading musician.

Pounding away on his huge, human-skinned drum, the sound from which reverberated a powerful directness, the ogre drummer held responsibility for pushing the troops on throughout the long journey.

Navigating the treacherous route, this army of Ogres was the antithesis of the common opinion of the ogre race and its military prowess; throughout the Orb, ogres were considered ill-disciplined, quarrelsome, greedy, dim-witted, and incapable of military unification. Though the travelling troops did hold to some of the common traits associated with their race, they were brutal creatures with a violent temper, and some of these soldiers had previously served as cut-throat mercenaries of the highest bidder, under the charge of their general, Sting Stonebreaker, this army was a well-trained force of savvy veteran fighters.

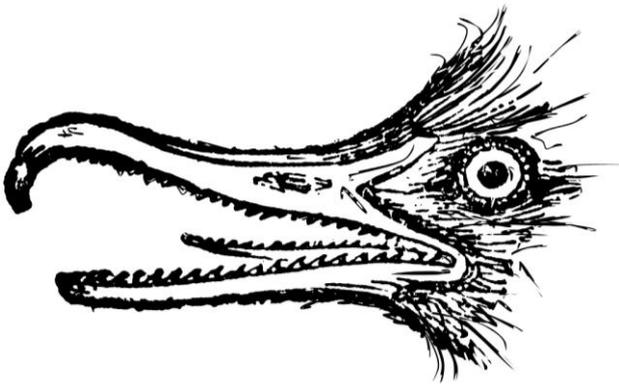


# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: DRACO

The unstoppable wave of rampaging, animalistic violence and destruction had overcome Ruvik, the celebrated city of the Konstrato Empire. Having brutally slaughtered all in their path, butchering without prejudice civilians and soldiers alike, the frenzied force of Fiends now set about sacking the city.



Standing in the centre of the large, ornate cathedral with his retinue of dark-hearted cultists holding captive the few surviving priests, as the cacophony of chaos sounded all around him, Draco, the raiding party's shaman, delighted in the desecration of one of the Konstrato Empire's most holy locations. Tomes of religious texts were aflame, while vast tapestries of the finest elven silk, having once displayed the sacred story of the god Endovelicus, now lay in tatters upon the bloodstained, mosaiced marble floor. As he ordered his cultists to strap the first chained priest to the altar, in blatant defiance of the god Endovelicus, while offering praise to his own lord, the Jackal God, N'Kish, Draco would desecrate further the sanctified place of worship.



# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: DUROC THE GLUTTONOUS

Crushing the screaming spearman's skull with a single, powerful blow of his heavy, iron-forged hammer, without missing a heartbeat, Duroc the Gluttonous quickly swung round to meet another soldier of the Konstrato Empire. Lifting once more his huge tool of war, bringing the blood-soaked weapon firmly into his assailant's body,



the orc warlord shattered the man's chest with ease. As his destroyed heart pumped out blood like a flooded canal, the soldier fell backwards, his lifeless body hitting the muddy earth with a sickening thud. Lost in a state of frenzy and bloodlust, Duroc cleaved his hammer through the air and obliterated the dead soldier's head. As fragments of pulverised brains and shattered bone splattered onto his scarred, porcine face, the veteran orc leader eyed the Konstrato Empire's line beginning to break. He saw the defending soldiers, their spirits broken, begin to turn and flee. Bringing from his throat a guttural roar, Duroc ordered his troops, "Butcher them!"

With broken bodies underfoot, Duroc continued to lead his army from the front as he pursued the fleeing fighters. Seeing in their warlord the spirit of their god, Sus, the rampaging horde of Orcs charged after the retreating Konstrato Empire troops. Like hounds in a hunt, the orcs,

salivating as the metallic smell of blood filled their snorting and grunting noses, savagely descended on the remaining spearmen.

Exhausted and petrified, their shaking bodies offering token resistance, many soldiers of the Konstrato Empire pleaded for their lives. Others, seeing their comrades' calls for mercy ignored by the crazed orcs, cried out to the blood-steaked sky, desperately seeking the intervention of their god, Endovelicus. Unhearing or uncaring, Endovelicus remained a passive observer. The orcs felled the fleeing soldiers like storm-damaged saplings.

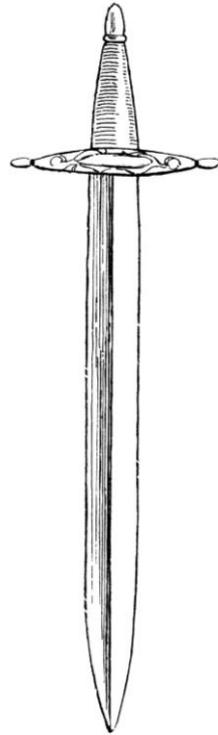
With blood coursing down his battered face from a deep gash to his forehead, held for the attention of Duroc, the commander of the defending Konstrato Empire outpost lifted his heavy head to meet the hateful gaze of his counterpart. Knowing it to be futile, the commander did not plead for his life, besides, in his death-mingled state, he now saw with fading eyes his place in the heavens of Endovelicus. Dropping his hammer to the ground, where, with an ominous sound, it clattered against an abandoned enemy shield, Duroc stared at the restrained commander. Removing from his belt a filthy but keen-edged dagger, Duric slashed at the commander's throat. Falling limply to his knees, before collapsing face first into the dirt, his lifeforce pooling around his head like a crimson halo, as he choked his final breath, the commander heard Duroc bellow, "Through war and destruction, we offer our praise to the great God of Gluttony!"



# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: FALLING BLADES

Igniting the fuses of their lightweight fire lances, as the rampaging army of Orcs, led by the elite Blades of Sus units, powered towards them under a cloud of fury, calmly and carefully, the Foot Soldiers took aim. Then, amidst a crescendo of gunpowder explosions and orange-tinged smoke, a volley of scrap shot was directed towards the snarling and snorting horde of Orcs. Hitting the unit with shattering force, piercing through thick hides with ease, taking out eyes and puncturing windpipes, littering the orcs with a vicious assault of shrapnel, the shot ripped into the porcine-featured beasts.

With their number now halved, the Blades of Sus, apoplectic with rage, tore forward, keen to satiate their bloodlust, as well as avenge the fallen. The orcs bellowed praises to their god Sus, while raising their mighty man-sized swords and axes. Just as the orc warriors were about to bring down their awesome weapons and crash into the unit of Foot Soldiers, each of the Lords' troops dropped to one knee and thrust their fire lances upwards as they looked to skewer the bellowing beasts. Before they were able to bloody their weapons, the charging Blades of Sus, carried forward by their frenzied momentum, launched themselves into a wall of gleaming spearheads.



# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: MANFRED DE ROUGE

An obsessive and inquisitive child with a fervent and fevered interest in the obscure and esoteric, Manfred de Rouge had been drawn to the dark arts from an early age. As the young boy matured, so too did his interest in all things unhallowed. Voraciously consuming knowledge on vampirism and necromancy from ancient, worm-holed tomes, Manfred's interest became a frantic obsession. Such was his manic enthusiasm for the worlds of the undead and his desire for immortality, Manfred made soul-surrendering pacts with Barnabas, God of the Undead. From his macabre master, along with an insatiable thirst for blood, Manfred was gifted with superordinary strength, animal-sharp senses and arcane, necromantic powers. Still, Manfred yearned for more mastery of resurrecting the dead as he pictured himself at the head of a mighty swathe of supernatural creatures.



Turning his back on the place of his birth, the pious and prosperous, Endovelicus-worshipping city of Fyrd, abandoning the trappings of his comfortable life as a lesser official of the Konstrato Empire, Manfred began a nefarious, vagabond existence. Though still perfecting his vile craft, it was during this time that Manfred began to raise a burgeoning dark force of undead abominations to serve him. Keen to expand his unholy horde, backed by his twitching and groaning resurrected servants, while also welcoming into his fiendish fold the necromancers, Otto Shroud and Dieter Hellstand, Manfred embarked on a quest for the lost grimoire, *Inmortui Scripturas*.

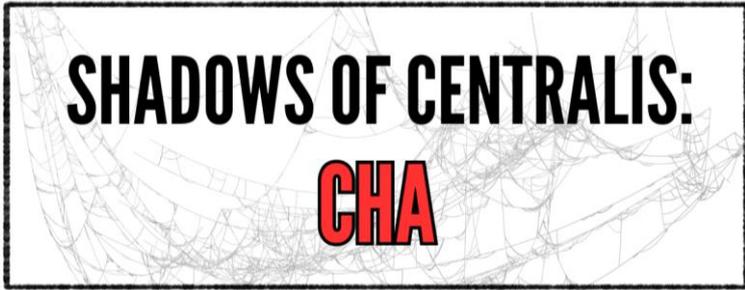
# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: ADAKITE

There had been troubling reports of a small but powerful band of Trolls travelling through the dusty wastelands a little north of Sanctuary Ultionis, the sanctuary-kingdom of the T'Zor-worshipping Damned. Fearing these troops to be on a scouting mission, ahead of a larger invasion, a Damned army, led by the mighty Harbinger of Damnation, Tabanidae, headed to meet these would-be invaders. Assisting Tabanidae in his battlefield command were two supernatural gifts of T'Zor, these being dark, disease-championing demons, Ca and Tx, as well as a Key of Damnation called Tsetse, and the hate-filled warlock, Autolysis.



Trudging with a tireless pace, leading his nomadic force of Trolls, known as the Breccia tribe, was a chieftain called Adakite. Forming Adakite's retinue was the tribe's champion, Mudstone, along with the hot-headed mystic, Tufa. Rather than being the scouting party which the Damned considered them to be, this force of Trolls was simply seeking fresh lands to sack and plunder, before moving on to the next unsuspecting settlement.

Though Adakite had been looking for easy pickings, perhaps an unprotected farmstead or poorly fortified village, when faced with an opposing army of the Damned, the troll chieftain chose to meet them head-on. Shying away from a conflict was something which ran contrary to Adakite's war-loving character. The veteran chieftain, backed by his champion and mystic, both of whom held especially destructive tendencies, felt confident that, though outnumbered, his tribe would easily rout the fetid force before them.



# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS:

## CHA

Raising heavy eyelids to reveal gleaming and concentrated eyes, casting his dark stare into the ominous, pregnant clouds which filled the leaden sky, Cha let out a guttural, bloodcurdling roar which reverberated in the ears of the surrounding, entranced cultists. Their sycophantic minds flooded with the kaleidoscopic intoxication which resulted from consuming ceremonial blood broths laced with chicoi, the dozen cultists, the 'chosen ones', grinned insanely as they rocked to the hypnotic sound of beating tom-toms.

In an unknown, mystical tongue, whispering unholy prayers to N'kish, the Jackal God, Cha considered the cultists around him as he drank deeply from the Cup of Choice, an ancient relic believed to have once belonged to Vorik the Tainted of the Konstrato Empire, widely considered the first Fiend and the original prophet of N'kish. Eagerly, each hoping to be chosen as the gift to N'kish, the wild cultists, wearing thick furs over bodies adorned with esoteric tattoos, with leathered, shrunken heads hanging from their belts, jostled for recognition.

Pointing a sharp finger to a tall, lean cultist with shaven head and teeth filed to resemble those of a canine, Cha made his choice. The chosen cultist jabbered frantically as he raced to position himself in the sacrificial seat, a low-positioned apparatus with wrist and ankle fastenings to hold its guest in place. As Cha's attendants secured the crazed cultist to the sacred seat, the shaman let out a howl of praise to N'kish, then sank a hooked blade deep into the chest of the sacrificial cultist. As the cultist, N'kish's gift, yelled in a fusion of agony and intense joy, Cha carved out the man's still beating heart, whispered skywards, then sank his teeth into the warm flesh of the sacrifice's lifeforce...

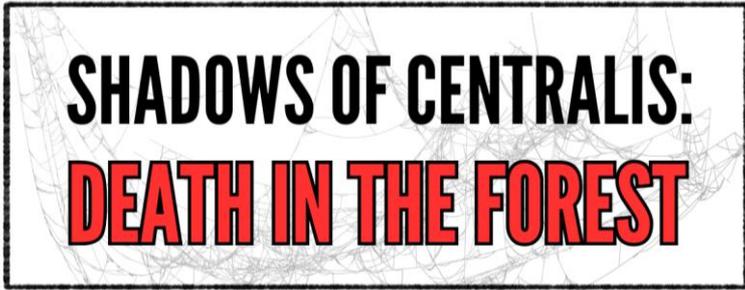
# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: N'YA

Projecting a booming, ground-tremoring guttural roar, which abruptly adulterated the still and crisp early morning air, N'ya bellowed his praise to the Beast God, N'kish. An unhallowed and bloodthirsty torturer of enslaved souls, N'kish, sometimes known as the Jackal God, was the deity of the Fiends.



Clearly blessed by his god, N'ya was a hulking monstrosity, his oversized humanoid form saw him stand upon huge cloven hooves, from which stemmed powerful calves and muscular thighs. His herculean torso and mighty arms were covered with layers of ill-kempt chainmail shirts and mismatched armour. Meanwhile, with his hide covered in filthy, coarse, blood-soiled matted hair, the Fiends warlord carried a fetid stench.

Around N'ya, under the heady influence of their intoxicating blood-based libations, human cultists, who had long ago adopted the mindset of beasts, chanted with dark tongues as their wicked blades glinted in the twilight. These twisted denizens of caliginosity would draw the fire of the enemy, while units of Fiends armed with close combat weapons would take the fight forward. Savage but sagacious, N'ya, the self-proclaimed Hand of N'kish, had carefully planned this attack on the dwarven garrison. Having, during the preceding weeks, polluted their wells with rotting corpses and interrupted their supply of provisions through stealthy ambushes, N'ya was leading his Fiends into conflict with a much-weakened force of Dwarfs. N'ya knew, though, given the ingrained stoical and resolute nature of dwarfs, that the defending troops would still not capitulate easily.

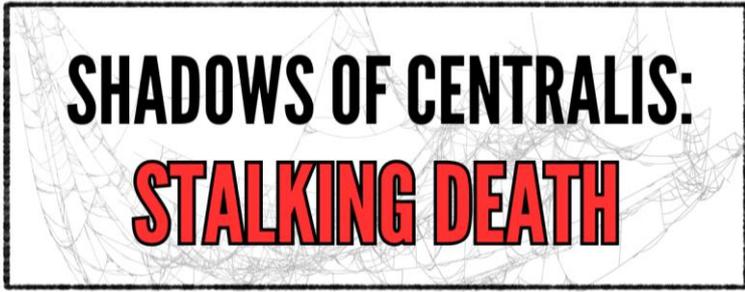


# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: DEATH IN THE FOREST

As intoxicating accents of camphor mingled with invigorating tones of lemon and mint, the warm and gentle, perfumed breeze whispered an unnerving menace as the forest, wild and wondrous, observed the journeying band of trespassing goblins. Hacking away at the thick undergrowth with their wicked blades, snapping branches and slashing at vines, while cursing the Orphelian kingdom, as they made a path through the dense woodland, the goblins continued in their arduous trek.

As day slipped gently into night and a high moon cast a radiating luminous iridescence, with a coolness of air dampening the spicy woodland aromas, the party of goblins made camp in a small clearing. Around a small, crackling fire which threw sharp shadows of the goblins' frames and features, the creatures gorged on roasted pine squirrels. Then, causing all to cease eating and quickly cast their panicked eyes around them, the goblins shuddered to a choir of spinechilling shrieks.

Emerging from the darkness with an otherworldly pace of movement, wild-eyed and furious, as vengeful grins danced upon their half-shadowed, semi-human faces, creatures bearing branch-like talons and bark-covered bodies slashed through the ill-prepared goblins. As the ancient trees around them echoed with their kill calls, the dryads stained the forest floor with the sticky, tar-red blood of the goblins. The attack was rapid and violent. Upon slaying the trespassers, of which none were spared, the killers of the night let out a tangled holler, before fading into the woodland. As they heard the beckoning of their forest protectors, nearby brown bears came to feast on the goblin corpses.



# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: STALKING DEATH

Positioned high in the chill night sky, partially draped with nightshaded-toned, ghostly clouds, the Orb's main moon, Mani, radiated a menacing broken brilliance which cast an unearthly light through the broken, twisted branches of the diseased forest below. As an otherworldly, biting breeze, fetid and evil, whistled its way through the weird woodland, the weary elven traveller clutched his fur-collared robe tighter around his shivering shoulders. With each laboured step, as he battled a body-aching fatigue, the tired traveller considered the inherent evil which tainted the very air he breathed. Here, all surroundings threatened menace.

Though the weatherbeaten face of the lilywhite-skinned journeyman bore livid scars of war, it was his eyes, two inky black pools, which spoke of a loss most profound, that told of the true horrors of battle which haunted him. But that was a different time, a different life, for many long years now the former warrior had wandered the Orb as a religious vagabond, spreading the teachings of the goddess of the elven race, the great and just Dagnr.

Treading cautiously through the strange half-light, as he struggled to negotiate the thick, thorny undergrowth, as wicked branches appeared to claw at him with supernatural vigour, the traveller placed an unsteady foot through a soft and squelchy object which gave way to a sickening crunch. As uneasy anxiety bled into agitated panic, looking down, the once warrior, now wanderer, curiously eyed the ground underfoot. It was at this moment that the clouds overhead cleared so that Mani's full luminescence shone onto the jaded journeyman, allowing him to observe beneath his feet a nightmare sight. Pustuled and pestilent, engorged, loathsome maggots, which writhed in a seeming ecstasy of gross fulfilment, feasted greedily on

the gory remains of a torn and shredded human torso. Like a ruined rampart, broken and twisted, fleshless ribs teemed with these devourers of disease. A few feet to the left of the butchered, maggot-infested carcass, with its cap hewed clean off, exposing a pulpy mess of decomposing brains, a semi-fleshed skull rested in a puddle of blood and filth.

In petrified silence, casting his disbelieving eyes over the corrupted ground, turning left and right, the traveller's eyes fell upon scene after scene of macabre massacres. Filled with revulsion, as he suppressed his nauseated retchings, the elven traveller whispered a prayer to Dagnr, "Priestess of fortune, purest of heart, great goddess of all that is holy, watch over me. Guide me through this land of abomination. Blessed are those under the guidance of Dagnr."

Still digesting the unhallowed, sickening scene which tempered his heart to a pulsating panic, choking back his shaking fear, there came to the traveller's ears a sound which seared his soul. Colouring the air with tones of unspeakable horror, a hellish, bloodcurdling roar echoed loudly through the forest. This din of untethered evil inspired within the traveller a depth of terror never before known to him.

In response to the unholy roar which so terrified the traveller, there awoke from lands afar savage creatures innumerable. Bearing beady, bloodred eyes, gigantic, chittering rats with crooked tails and filth-matted fur emerged from their underground nests in a wave of wickedness. In a scream of savagery, a score of enormous, evil-eyed bats descended from the skies above. Leaving their dark dens, pacing through the thick forest with heavy padded paws, packs of great wild wolves howled in excited anticipation. Many were the denizens of darkness which came to answer the cruel call.

Nearer and nearer, louder and louder, this nauseating noise, awesome and awful, vicious and vile, came upon the traveller until the unwholesome source of the malevolent sound came into his shaking vision. Standing before him was a sight most hideous and picture most foul. Winged and serpentine, with four powerful legs and an enormous gaping maw, this creature of darkness resembled in most basic aspects a dragon. But whereas dragons are ancient and wise and graceful in their powerful movements, this abomination

from the nethermost pit of hell inspired the most extreme feelings of disgust. Folded like broken beggars, the beast's torn and tattered wings were held tightly to its splintered and sickly spine. Its immense, scaled hide was rent with unhealed blows of old and pitted with great holes of rancid decay. An animated carrion which bled disease and gestated decay, this towering spawn of all that is unholy was fuelled with a blasphemous, undead vitality.

With thick coils of acrid smoke spiralling upwards from the snorting nostrils of its long and leathery, rotting face, with glowering yellow eyes which spoke of an all-consuming hatred for all living beings, with jaws of jagged, filth-encrusted teeth, having long ago been risen from the peaceful slumber of death by foul necromancy, this maleficent monster was a diabolic parody of a dragon. Having followed the scent of the journeying elf for some time, stalking in the shadows, now able to cast its unearthly glare fully upon the petrified traveller, the fetid and fearsome dragon drew its gigantic jaws wide open and propelled a torrent of raging fire towards the trespasser.

"A corpse dragon!" gasped the traveller as he drew back in terror, "Dagnr, goddess of purity and light, be with me! I pray thee, bless my blade and strengthen my shield as I purge this evil in your name." The traveller then reached behind and grabbed from his back a rune-inscribed, circular, silver shield. Quickly, the traveller held this before him as he knelt to the ground and readied himself to receive the unfurling bolt of white-hot fire.

With the traveller's mighty, thrice blessed shield saving him from all but a scorched brow and singed hair, as the corpse dragon exhausted its fiery breath, the embattled elf whispered another prayer, "Great goddess, Dagnr, bless this blade." Then, with shield on arm and gleaming sword in hand, through curtains of unholy smoke which burned and blistered his throat, while stinging his eyes, with unnerving pace the traveller tore towards the dragon of undeath. With elven pace the traveller was upon his abominable adversary. With his powerful right arm, he cleaved his heavy sword deeply into the neck of his monstrous foe; slicing through flesh and crushing bone. "Cursed creature! Foul fiend! I swear unto Dagnr that I will slay

thee, lest my soul be forfeit to the foul powers that gave rise to your being!”

Snarling in rage, as its neck buckled beneath the blow of the traveller’s mighty sword, using its huge, spiked tail, the undead beast struck at the elf with such ferocity and force that his sacred shield folded like crumpled parchment. With its runic adornments shattered and its blessings broken, the elf’s shield was now useless. Casting down his broken protection, breathing deeply as he pictured in his mind the slaying of this beast of hell, the elf took his sword in both hands, then ran pell-mell towards his fiendish foe. Like a leaping salmon throwing itself upstream, the traveller threw himself into the air and hewed his blade into the corrupted chest of the fire breathing beast. As a thick tar-black blood issued forth, the blow ripped open the beast’s great breast. But before the traveller could land another blow, apoplectic with anger, throwing back the elf with a swipe of its powerful front claws which ripped through the elf’s leather jerkin and deeply lacerated his torso, the enraged corpse dragon cast its adversary high into the air. Crashing to the corpse-strewn ground, smashing his head against a large rock, the traveller lay in a broken, moaning heap.

Breathing deeply, with fresh fire brought from its inner furnace, the unhallowed undead beast belched another torrent of fire towards the crumpled elf. Unable to shield himself from the flames, the elf yelled out in a paroxysm of agony. Rolling around the gory ground in a frenzy of pain, the elf desperately tried to extinguish the fire which ravaged his form, but his efforts to douse the flames were stillborn. With his body ablaze, unable to quell the caustic terrorism of the flames which engulfed him, as his snow-white skin melted and became as wax of a lit candle, the traveller’s death throes were a sight most ghastly. Tearing into the blackened body of the defeated traveller, the corpse dragon ate hungrily. Upon having had its grisly fill, the undead monster then tossed the bloody and ragged remains across the already gruesome forest floor, adding further decoration to a carpet of horrors. There followed a frenzied feast of leftovers for the creatures of darkness that had earlier been awoken, as rabid rats and beastly bats satiated their dark hungers, while snarling wolves tore at the remains with frenzied bloodlust.

# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: SONG OF THE GLEEFUL GOBLINS

*"We'll hack and slash, we'll sing and laugh.*

*We'll flay their skins, we'll grin and grin.*

*We'll kill and kill, we'll have our fill.*

*We'll have the luck, we kill for Puck.*

*Our blades be sharp, we'll pierce their hearts.*

*Our blades be quick, blood will run thick.*

*Our blades will gleam, their blood will stream.*

*Our blades be strong, we'll sing our song.*

*They be dwarfs, they be fat.*

*We'll beat their hides, we'll lay them flat.*

*They be bearded, they be round.*

*We'll pound their skulls into the ground.*

*We'll take their riches, they'll rest in ditches.*

*We'll take their holds, they'll double in folds.*

*Praise be to Puck, our mighty saviour.*

*Bless us with you special favour.*

*For him we fight, to him we pray.*

*For him we march, for him we slay."*

# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: LUT

With its hairy toothed, lime-green leaves and translucent disk-like seedpods, the chicoi plant is a biennial of the family Brassicaceae. Known for its adrenalin heightening properties, the roots of chicoi are often used in the production of stimulants. Though considered with caution by many of the Orb's inhabitants, races such as hag elves and goblins delight in the feelings of agitated, nervous excitement which stem from the effects of ingesting the prepared roots of the chicoi plant.



Lut, often referred to as the Star Treader, a mercurial goblin shaman who was gifted with kaleidoscopic visions, was a habitual user of chicoi. As much as Lut absorbed himself in the effects of chicoi, he also used the plant in conjunction with strong wines and psilocybin enriched punches. These intoxicants, coupled with his mastery of magic, served as a vehicle to communicating with the Goblin God, Puck. Traversing the arcs of time, transcending dimensions and realities, Lut was a frequent guest of Puck; his second-self revelled in the mania of the god's lavish masquerade balls. Such was his close connection with the goblin overseer, Lut, the great Star Treader, was himself almost deified in goblin society.

As his deep-yellow eyes became pale and glazed, before rolling back in his head, the shaman offered himself to the transformative effects of his heady, mind-expanding spiritual cocktail, as well as the esoteric power of magic. First experiencing a feeling of indescribable euphoria, his body aglow with intense delight, Lut then descended into a maelstrom of agonising pain. His body, shaken with icy chills, ached, while, dry-mouthed, he frantically gasped for breath....

Clawing at the sickening visions of loathsome and pestiferous horror which entered into his view, his eyes pinned open with invasive optical vices which needled into his skull, as he slipped between realities, Lut suffered torments of endless depths as a multitude of snarling demons and cruel demigods delighted in toying with the mind and soul of the goblin shaman.

Lut witnessed monstrous abominations contorting in fits of ecstatic joy, convulsed in maniacal laughter, as they ripped crusted, crimson scabs from their diseased hides, and each time they did so, he felt a searing pain as strips of his own flesh were supernaturally torn from his body. Other creatures, oddly bodied fusions of man and beast, hungrily ate dismembered limbs from enormous obsidian cups. As these gruesome fiends, lost in a frenzy of gory greed, satiated their repugnant cravings, each bloody mouthful tore at the soul of Lut.

Gradually, Lut's visions of horror began to fade, the intense mental, physical, and spiritual anguish which had crippled him slowly eased, his body relaxed, and, with the skull-penetrating vices which had forced him into a permanent state of seeing now gone, he found he could blink his eyes. Looking about himself, Lut found his body was unharmed, there were no injuries or markings, no evidence at all of the agonies he had suffered. As a warm tranquillity began to wash over his mind, like a sea settling after a torrential storm, within himself, Lut felt a sense of calmness beginning to grow, as well as a heightened feeling of awareness, and increased knowledge. Meanwhile, a new addition to his person, around Lut's neck, fixed to a corroded silver chain, hung a small obsidian charm which held at its centre the eye of an owl, while in the deep pockets of his tattered robes rested many different molluscs and crustaceans.

No longer the plaything of demons and dark demigods, Lut found himself within a mystical realm bestrewn with abstract and amorphous architecture, ornate, sky-reaching temples, and wild, overgrown vegetation. Though Lut had travelled many cosmic paths before, though he had encountered many strange locations, some terrifying, some idyllic, others simply bizarre, he had never before come across anything such as this. With the structures around him defying reason, adorned with unusual, perplexing cuneiform markings

unlike anything he had seen before, decorated in mesmerising symphonies of obsidian statues, it was in a state of wonder and awe in which Lut considered his otherworldly surroundings.

Soon after entering into one of the realm's many imposing and elaborately decorated temples, Lut happened upon a cloaked figure swinging an aromatic censer of opiate odours as it walked the dimly lit passages of the dank, labyrinthine structure. With a heavy hood concealing its features, the figure spoke in whispering voice, though its lips did not move, "Welcome, traveller, to the shadows of sanctuary. Abandon your sense of self, surrender your desires, and reject your god, Puck. Do this, and to you a life of eternal peace is yours. If not given of your own accord, this place will take your soul, and you will suffer an endless cycle of death, rebirth, and torture." The figure then slowly removed its heavy hood to reveal to Lut a face which mirrored his own, though its eyes, sunken deep in its head and fitted with ocular vices, gleamed with an intense duplicity.

Returning to stalk the shadows of the temple, Lut's doppelganger faded into the distance of the passageway, leaving behind him a trail of benzoin-tainted air mingled with tones of chicoi. With a condemnatory voice, Lut's strange double spoke softly to the walls around him, "He is yours, Centralis. Take him and take his god. Take their souls and crush their spirits. Let them become toilers of the forgotten sea as albatrosses feed on their cycle of suffering."

As Lut breathed deeply the censer's evaporating aroma, he bellowed after the disappearing figure, "Praise be to Puck, the Jester King! Blessed is buffoonery and lunacy delight. Eat, drink, laugh, and fight!" Devout in his belief, filled with a burning faith in Puck, the shaman then turned and climbed the marble steps of a nearby staircase.

As he climbed the stairs, so too he descended, colours melted and the air become thick with the smell of gunpowder, while around him a noise of screaming baboons filled the air. Becoming almost hypnotic, screams became mixed with barks of delight, music and merriment. The sounds around Lut reached a crescendo as the polished steps beneath his feet morphed into the mosaiced courtyard of Puck's celestial dwelling. The dark, stone walls of the staircase gave way to images of jubilant, mask-wearing goblin revellers, cavorting and

jostling with wild abandon as they breathed the excitement of Puck's crazed masquerade ball.

For all the dancing, music, fireworks and more, forming the centrepiece of Puck's ball, surrounded by guffawing goblin guests, was a huge, multi-tiered banqueting table which groaned under the weight of food and drink placed upon it. Trays of mixed pickles garnished with pepper and saffron, bowls of cabbage chowder and plates of haddock in creamed mushrooms sat next to heaped piles of dates, fermented figs, and glazed apples, while tobacco-coated roasted meats were crammed next to huge platters of cakes and rich, alcohol-based puddings. As much food as the straining table held, though, places were prioritised for enormous troughs of psilocybin enriched punches, bottles of chicoi-laced wines, and huge ceramic jugs of heady mead, all of which never seemed to run dry as guests lost themselves to intoxicated merrymaking.

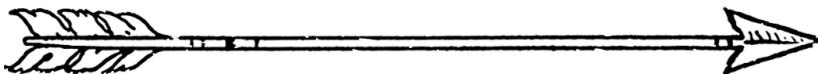


# SHADOWS OF CENTRALIS: WAR ON THE WAVES

The forceful but frigid north wind, biting non-gloved hands and stinging uncovered faces, assisted in powering the formidable fleet of the Konstrato Empire through the mystical waves of the Whispering Seas as the followers of Endovelicus closed in on the piratical flotilla of Hag Elves. Having navigated treacherous storms and negotiated a multitude of monstrous sea beasts, the ships of the Konstrato Empire had been in pursuit of their corrupted elven enemy for several days. Now, finally, pulling within range, the cannons aboard the Konstrato Empire ships could be unleashed upon the vile worshippers of the dark gods.



Erupting with a thundering sound which shook decks and echoed far across the windswept waves, the awesome Konstrato Gunships released a mighty volley of cannon fire which blasted into the Hag Elf vessels, ripping through masts and blasting holes in hulls. As scores of panicked hag elves scrambled to position ballistae and return fire, even more cannon balls rained down upon them. With their ships flooding with icy water, as the briny sea began to envelop the slate-grey vessels of the Hag Elves, those aboard threw profane curses at the Konstrato Empire and made death-pacts with their own gods.



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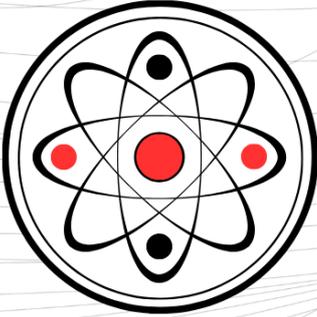
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# COFFEE MUTTERINGS

## M.R. James

Montague Rhodes James was born on August 1, 1862, in the picturesque English village of Goodnestone, Dover, Kent. His parents were Herbert James, a clergyman, and his wife Mary Emily Horton. Meanwhile, he also had two older brothers, Sydney and Herbert, as well as an older sister, Grace. Soon after James was born, the family moved to Suffolk, with James' father serving as rector of Great Livermere's St. Peter's church.



From the ages of eleven to fourteen, James attended Temple Grove School, a private boarding school in London. He then continued his private education, attending Eton College, before entering into King's College, Cambridge. A keen academic, James excelled as a medievalist. A well-respected scholar, James was made a fellow of King's College, Cambridge. James held close associations with both Eton College and King's College, Cambridge throughout his life. In addition to being appointed Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, James was Provost, first, of King's College, Cambridge, then Eton College. Furthermore, he was later Cambridge University's Vice Chancellor as well.

Serving as much-loved Christmas Eve traditions, James originally told his ghost stories to enthusiastic audiences at Eton and Cambridge. Including Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book, and Lost Hearts, James also saw

his tales in print via periodicals of the day, with the former story appearing in an issue of National Review (March 1895), and the latter appearing in an issue of Pall Mall Magazine (December 1895). It was only a number of years later when James' gothic and ghostly tales were collected and published as hardback books.

*“Sly humorous vignettes and bits of lifelike genre portraiture and characterisation are often found in Dr. James’ narratives, and serve in his skilled hands to augment the general effect rather than to spoil it, as the same qualities would tend to do with lesser craftsmen.”*

**H.P. Lovecraft on M.R. James.**

Published by Edward Arnold in 1904, James' first published book of ghostly tales was Ghost Stories of an Antiquary. Comprising eight short stories, the book also includes a handful of illustrations by James McBryde, a close friend of James', who, aged just thirty years old, died before the book was published. Recently married, McBryde left behind a young wife, Gwendolen, and daughter, Jane. Following her father's untimely death, James became guardian to Jane, while holding a close friendship with her mother.



*“St. Bertrand de Comminges is a decayed town on the spurs of the Pyrenees, not very far from Toulouse, and still nearer to Bagneres-de-Luchon. It was the site of a bishopric until the Revolution, and has a cathedral which is visited by a certain number of tourists. In the spring of 1883 an Englishman arrived at this old-world place – I can hardly dignify it with the name of city, for there are not a thousand inhabitants.”*

Taken from Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book by M.R. James, first published in 1904.



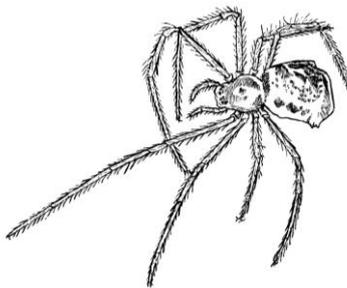
### **The Ash-tree**

The Ash-tree tells the tale of Mrs. Mothersole, a woman believed to be a witch and sentenced to death. Condemned to this fate by the evidence voiced by a character called Sir Matthew Fell; it is reported that Mrs. Mothersole, under the illumination of the moon, climbed a large ash-tree and cut off small branches with a knife, while seeming to talk to herself. As she stands at the gallows, before being hanged, Mrs. Mothersole declares, "There will be guests at the Hall."

Some weeks after the execution of Mrs. Mothersole, after witnessing a squirrel-like, multi-armed creature traverse the branches of the ash-tree, Sir Matthew Fell is found dead in his bed, the cause of his death unknown.

Generations pass, as the story details the grandson of Sir Matthew Fell, Sir Richard; after reading a note written by his grandfather within an old Bible which orders the felling of the ash-tree, Sir Richard looks to destroy it, but is soon found dead in his bed.

Leading to the story's conclusion, upon inspection of the ash-tree by a group of locals, a lantern is accidentally dropped, prompting the tree to catch fire. As the ash-tree blazes, monstrous spiders as large as human heads emerge, succumbing to the flames or clubbed to death. Then, discovered beneath the tree is a cavernous nest from which the spiders came, along with the suspected corpse of Mrs. Mothersole.





### **Number 13**

Set in a hotel called the Golden Lion, a multi-roomed boarding-house in Viborg, a city of central Jutland, Denmark, a researcher of Danish church history begins to experience supernatural happenings as he observes strange noises coming from the neighbouring room, number 13, a room which he knew did not exist.

Perplexed by the existence of number 13 and the noises which emanating from it, along with the seeming shrinking of his own room and disappearance of various items, the researcher questions the hotel's owner. The hotel's owner describes that he is not superstitious, but allowing for guests who are, claiming that to stay in a room with the number 13 brings bad luck, he has not allowed any room within the hotel to bear this number.

Looking to shake off his confusion, the researcher dismisses what he has previously seen and heard. However, unable to close from his mind the events of number 13, with loud singing, dancing, and laughter sounding, along with the hotel's owner and another hotel guest, the researcher investigates the mysterious non-room.

Upon approaching number 13, something which in itself leaves the hotel owner dumbstruck as he knows that his hotel has no such room, the door opens and a flailing arm, wild and monstrous, violently claws at the investigating group. The door then closes to the sound of unhallowed laughter.

The group return to the room with extra men. Then, upon smashing the door's lock with a crowbar, the door merges into a plaster wall as it fades back into non-existence. Later, the wooden floor outside the disappeared number 13 is opened up and a copper box is found. Within the box, deemed to be written in Latin or Old Danish, is what appears to be an agreement between a man and Satan.

James' second book of collected short stories was *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, which was published by Edward Arnold in 1911. With Edward Arnold remaining his publisher of choice, James' third book of short stories, *A Thin Ghost and Others*, was published in 1919. Of this collection, James reflected, "I have had my doubts about the wisdom of publishing a third set of tales; sequels are, not only proverbially but actually, very hazardous things. However, the tales make no pretence but to amuse, and my friends have not seldom asked for the publication. So not a great deal is risked, perhaps, and perhaps also someone's Christmas may be the cheerfuller for a storybook which, I think, only once mentions the war."

*"Nearer and nearer it came, and it was of a blackish-grey colour with more than one dark hole. It took shape as a face – a human face – a burnt human face; and with the odious writhings of a wasp creeping out of a rotten apple there clambered forth an appearance of a form, waving black arms prepared to clasp the head that was bending over them. With a convulsion of despair Humphreys threw himself back, struck his head against a hanging lamp, and fell."*

Taken from *Mr Humphreys and his Inheritance* by M.R. James, first published in 1911.

James' fourth collection of supernatural tales, *A Warning of the Curious and Other Ghost Stories*, was published by Edward Arnold in 1925. A few years later, in 1928, released as a standalone title, James' story *Wailing Well* was published by Mill House Press.

As well as his stories being published in book form, James also saw a number of his works published in periodicals, as well college magazines. Examples include *After Dark in the Playing Fields* (*College Days* (Eton magazine), 1924), *There Was a Man Dwelt by a Churchyard* (*Snapdragon* (Eton magazine), 1924), *Rats* (*At Random* (Eton magazine), 1929), *The Experiment* (*The Morning Post*, 1931), *The*

Malice of Inanimate Objects (The Masquerade (Eton magazine), 1933), and A Vignette (The London Mercury and Bookman, 1936).

In 1931, Edward Arnold released The Collected Ghost Stories of M.R. James, a sizeable, single volume which brings together each of the short stories of James' which they had previously published, along with Wailing Well, There was a Man Dwelt by a Churchyard, Rats, and After Dark in the Playing Fields.

*"In inventing a new type of ghost, he has departed considerably from the conventional Gothic tradition; for where the older ghost stories were pale and stately, and apprehended chiefly through the sense of sight, the average James ghost is lean, dwarfish, and hairy – a sluggish, hellish night-abomination midway betwixt beast and man – and usually touched before it is seen."*

H.P. Lovecraft on M.R. James.

Typically making use of innocuous settings, often centred around scholarly protagonists, James tends to gradually build up the terror of his supernatural stories as they progress. The prosaic backdrops incorporated into James' ghostly tales serve to make the otherworldly events that unfold all the more impactful. Meanwhile, as detailed within an introductory piece to Ghost Stories of an Antiquary, with regards to inspirations behind his tales, James commented, "If anyone is curious about my local settings, let it be recorded that St. Bertrand de Comminges and Viborg are real places; that in Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You I had Felixstowe in mind. As for the fragments of ostensible erudition which are scattered about my pages, hardly anything in them is not pure invention..." Making use of familiar settings and his medievalist knowledge, such inspirations were used by James throughout his short stories. For example, with regards to the setting of A School Story, James "had Temple Grove, East Sheen in mind," while the Cathedral of Barchester "is a blend of Canterbury, Salisbury, and Hereford."



### **Ghost Stories of an Antiquary**

Comprising eight short stories, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* was published by Edward Arnold in 1904.

Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book

Lost Hearts

The Mezzotint

The Ash-tree

Number 13

Count Magnus

Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad

The Treasure of Abbot Thomas

### **More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary**

Comprising seven short stories, *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* was published by Edward Arnold in 1911.

A School Story

The Rose Garden

The Tractate Middoth

Casting the Runes

The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral

Martin's Close

Mr. Humphreys and His Inheritance



### **A Thin Ghost and Others**

Comprising five short stories, *A Thin Ghost and Others* was published by Edward Arnold in 1919.

The Residence at Whitminster

The Diary of Mr. Poynter

An Episode of Cathedral History

The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance

Two Doctors

### **A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories**

Comprising six short stories, *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories* was published by Edward Arnold in 1925.

The Haunted Doll's House

The Uncommon Prayer-Book

A Neighbour's Landmark

A View from a Hill

A Warning to the Curious

An Evening's Entertainment

Aged seventy-three years old, James died in Eton, on June 12, 1936. Having dedicated his life to scholarly endeavours and literary works, James never married. The legacy he left behind is considerable. In addition to his stories of the supernatural, James penned many scholarly pieces, as well as guidebooks, children's books, and biographical reflections of his time at Eton and Cambridge.



## Arthur Machen

Son of John Edward Jones and his wife Janet Robina Machen, Arthur Llewellyn Jones, better known as Arthur Machen, was born in Caerleon, Monmouthshire, Wales, on March 3, 1863. Machen's father, for reasons of inheritance, took the name of his Scottish wife, Machen, and so passed this to his son.

Machen came from a religious background, with both his grandfather and father being clergymen. When Machen was an infant, upon his grandfather's death, following his time as a curate in Derbyshire, his father brought the family back to the historic town of Caerleon. Stepping in to serve the now shepherd-less parishioners, Machen's father became the rector of churches in Llanddewi Fach and Llandegfedd. Consequently, surrounded by lands steeped in Roman history and Arthurian legend, Machen grew up at the rectory of Llanddewi Fach. The rural Welsh setting in which Machen grew up, along with his keen interests in spiritualism, occultism, and history, formed the cornerstones of his later writings. Meanwhile, among the writers he enjoyed reading as a youngster were, among others, Walter Scott, Thomas De Quincey, and Alfred Tennyson.

*"I remember reading Dante in Longfellow's translation, from beginning to end, and though I could not by any manner of means lift up my heart and mind to the mountain-peak of the Paradise, I divined the majesty I could not comprehend."*

Taken from Things Near and Far by Arthur Machen, first published in 1923.

As part of his secondary education, Machen attended Hereford Cathedral School. His options for further education, however, were limited due to his parents being unable to afford his attending university. So it was that Machen looked to enter medical school instead, however, he failed the required exams. Machen then made efforts to support himself via various means, including journalistic endeavours, as well as tutoring children. Furthermore, throughout

this time, Machen was working on his own writings, resulting in the publication of his debut book, *Eleusinia*, a poetical work centred around the Eleusinian Mysteries of ancient Greece. Printed in 1881, the *Eleusinia* project was funded by Machen's father.

*“The road from Newport to Caerleon-on-Usk winds, as it comes near to the old Roman, fabulous city, with the winding of the tawny river which I have always supposed must be somewhat of the colour of the Tiber. This road was made early in the nineteenth century when stage-coaching came to perfection, for the old road between the two towns passed over the Roman bridge – blown down the river by a great storm in the seventeen-nineties – and climbed the break-neck hill to Christchurch. Well, this new road as I remember it was terraced, as it were, high above the Usk to the west, and above it to the east rose a vast wood, or what seemed a vast wood in 1870, called St. Julian’s Wood, of some fame as a ghostly place. It was cut down long ago by an owner who thought timber of high growth better than ghosts.”*

Taken from *Things Near and Far* by Arthur Machen, first published in 1923.

In 1884, using the pseudonym of Leolinus Siluriensis, Machen saw the publication of his second work, *The Anatomy of Tobacco: or Smoking Methodised, Divided, and Considered after a New Fashion*, written, as Machen later commented, “chiefly as a counter-irritant to loneliness and semi-starvation.” Machen followed this with translation work, which included, among other projects, a translation of Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptameron*.

In 1887, Machen married Amelia Hogg, a music teacher and theatre enthusiast. Through his wife, Machen became aware of the writer and

occultist A.E. Waite. Around this time, Machen's financial situation took a positive turn, as some fortunes from relatives were directed to him. Meanwhile, in 1888, Machen saw the publication of *The Chronicle of Clemendy*, which he described as "a volume of medieval tales."

*"It is not easy to make any picture of the horror that lay dark on the hearts of the people of Meirion. It was no longer possible to believe or to pretend to believe that these men and women and children had met their deaths through strange accidents. The little girl and the young labourer might have slipped and fallen over the cliffs, but the woman who lay dead with the dead sheep at the bottom of the quarry, the two men who had been lured into the ooze of the marsh, the family who were found murdered on the Highway before their own cottage door; in these cases there could be no room for the supposition of accident."*

Taken from *The Terror* by Arthur Machen, first published in 1917.

1890 saw Machen "writing essays and short stories and odds and ends and varieties for papers," resulting in, among other things, the publication of his short story *The Lost Club* (*The Whirlwind*, 1890). Indeed, the decade of the 1890's saw Machen enter into an exceptionally prolific stage of writing.

In 1894, going on to become one of his most popular works, backed with another of his short stories, *The Inmost Light*, and complete with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley, Machen's short story *The Great God Pan* was published. Machen had written this over 1890 and 1891, with parts of the work initially appearing in *The Whirlwind* newspaper. Further developed from its initial foundations, fusing surgery, spirituality, sexuality, mythology, folklore, and religion, the 1894 release of *The Great God Pan* was met with a harsh critical response.

As Machen reflected back to this time, he commented the story “made a mild sort of sensation with old ladies, on the press and off it.”

*“They shone with an awful light, looking far away, and a great wonder fell upon her face, and her hands stretched out as if to touch what was invisible; but in an instant the wonder faded, and gave place to the most awful terror. The muscles of her face were hideously convulsed, she shook from head to foot; the soul seemed struggling and shuddering within the house of flesh. It was a horrible sight, and Clarke rushed forward, as she fell shrieking to the floor.”*

Taken from *The Great God Pan* by Arthur Machen, first published in 1894.

Three notable Machen horror works of the mid-1890’s include *The Shining Pyramid*, *The Three Imposters*, and *The Red Hand*, each of which were published in 1895. Written around this time, though not published until 1907, was Machen’s *The Hill of Dreams*. Similarly, also written over the latter part of the 1890’s were *Ornaments in Jade* (1924), *The White People* (1904), *Hieroglyphics: A Note upon Ecstasy in Literature* (1902), and *A Fragment of Life* (1904).



*“And as the soldier heard these voices he saw before him, beyond the trench, a long line of shapes, with a shining about them. They were like men who drew the bow, and with another shout their cloud of arrows flew singing and tingling through the air towards the German hosts.”*

Taken from *The Bowmen* by Arthur Machen, first published in 1914.

Prompting a long depression, Machen's wife died in 1899. As he looked to deal with his grief, in addition to his writing, Machen took up acting as he joined a theatrical troupe touring Britain. It was also around this time that Machen joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, of which his



friend A.E. Waite was also a member. Wedding Dorotheie Purefoy Hudleston, Machen remarried in 1903. The couple went on to have two children together, their son Hilary in 1912, and their daughter Janet in 1917.

*“Lucian passed on his way wondering at the strange contrasts of the Middle Ages. How was it that people who could devise so beautiful a service believed in witchcraft, demoniacal possession and obsession, in the incubus and the succubus, and in the Sabbath and in many other horrible absurdities? It seemed astonishing that anybody could even pretend to credit such monstrous tales, but there could be no doubt that the dread of old women who rode on broomsticks and liked black cats was once a very genuine terror.”*

Taken from *The Hill of Dreams* by Arthur Machen, first published in 1907.

In 1910, Machen became a journalist for *The Evening News*. The newspaper also served as an outlet for some of the writer's short stories, which were first printed here before later being published in book form. Particularly significant Machen stories of the 1910's include *The Bowmen* (1914), *The Great Return* (1915), and *The Terror* (1917). By the early-1920's, however, Machen had moved on from *The Evening News*.

## The Bowmen

Based upon the Battle of Mons of the First World War, which was happening at the time, Arthur Machen wrote *The Bowmen* for inclusion in *The Evening News*. This short story details beleaguered British troops being granted support by the spirits of fallen bowmen of the Battle of Agincourt. Initially, some readers considered the supernatural story to be a factual account of actual events, prompting Machen to make clear that the story, while inspired by real events, was a piece of fiction.

Over the course of the 1920's, much of Machen's work tended to be essays, though he did pen three books which make up his autobiography, with these being *Far Off Things* (1922), *Things Near and Far* (1923), and *The London Adventure* (1924). Furthermore, in 1922, Machen also saw the long-awaited publication of his novel *The Secret Glory*. Several years in the writing, Machen had begun writing *The Secret Glory* in the late-1880's, continuing to work of the novel over the course of the 1890's. The story had then waited over a decade before eventually being published.



*“Mr. Machen, with an impressionable Celtic heritage linked to keen youthful memories of the wild domed hills, archaic forests, and cryptical Roman ruins of the Gwent countryside, has developed an imaginative life of rare beauty, intensity, and historic background.”*

H.P. Lovecraft on Arthur Machen.

By the 1930's, Machen's writings were becoming less and less frequent, though there were still some standout works, including, among other things, his short story *Opening the Door* (1931), as well as his novel *The Green Round* (1933). The following decade, on December 15, 1947, aged eighty-four years old, Machen died, leaving behind a most considerable and impressive catalogue of works which marks him as one of the most unique and influential writers of horror and weird fiction.

## Algernon Blackwood

Son of Stevenson Arthur Blackwood and his wife Harriet Dobbs, Algernon Henry Blackwood was born in Shooter's Hill, Kent, England, on March 14, 1869. With his father being a high-ranking Post Office administrator, while his mother was the widow of the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Manchester, Blackwood and his four siblings grew up in a financially comfortable household.

In his 1923 autobiography, *Episodes Before Thirty*, Blackwood reflected on himself as a child, "I was a dreamy boy, frequently in tears about nothing except a vague horror of the practical world, full of wild fancies and imagination and a great believer in ghosts, communings with spirits and dealings with charms and amulets..." Meanwhile, of his parents, Blackwood said, "My parents were both people of marked character, with intense convictions; my mother, especially, being a woman of great individuality, of iron restraint, grim humour, yet with a love and tenderness, and a spirit of uncommon sacrifice... she met my father at Kimbolton soon after his return from the Crimean War, where he had undergone that religious change of heart known to the movement as "conversion." From a man of fashion, a leader in the social life to which he was born, he changed with sudden completeness to a leader in the evangelical movement, then approaching its height. He renounced the world, the flesh, the devil and all their works... He became a teetotaler and nonsmoker, wrote devotional books, spoke in public, and held drawing-room prayer meetings, the Bible always in his pocket, communion with God always in his heart. His religion was genuine, unfaltering, consistent and sincere. He carried the war into his own late world of fashion. He never once looked back."

Led by his father's zealous beliefs, the Blackwood household was one of stifling Christian conformity. Meanwhile, throughout his childhood, Blackwood was privately educated. Looking to further promote Protestant Christian ideals, the young Blackwood was sent by his parents to be schooled in Germany, under the charge of the Moravian Brotherhood. Here, surrounded by the Black Forest, Blackwood's imagination fused legends of elves and dwarfs with the stunning beauty of the natural landscape around him.

*“Then suddenly, at the very moment of delicious capture, the dream turned horrible, becoming awful with the nightmare touch. The sky lost all its blue and sunshine. Far, far below him the little dove enticed him into nameless depths, so that he flew faster and faster, yet never fast enough to overtake it. Behind him came a great thing down the air, black, hovering, with gigantic wings outstretched. It had terrific eyes, and the beating of its feathers stole his wind away. It followed him, crowding space. He was aware of a colossal beak, curved like a scimitar and pointed wickedly like a tooth of iron. He dropped. He faltered. He tried to scream.*

*Through empty space he fell, caught by the neck. The huge spectral falcon was upon him. The talons were in his heart. And in sleep he remembered then that he had cursed. He recalled his reckless language. The curse of the ignorant is meaningless; that of the worshipper is real. This attack was on his soul. He had invoked it. He realised next, with a touch of ghastly horror, that the dove he chased was, after all, the bait that had lured him purposely to destruction, and awoke with a suffocating terror upon him, and his entire body bathed in icy perspiration. Outside the open window he heard a sound of wings retreating with powerful strokes into the surrounding darkness of the sky.”*

Taken from *The Wings of Horus* by Algernon Blackwood, first published in 1914.



Such was his appetite for the paranormal and knowledge of the occult, Blackwood spent time in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. He was also a member of The Ghost Club. As well as being a prolific writer who possessed a keen interest in spiritualism, mysticism, eastern philosophies, and occultism, Blackwood was also an enthusiast of outdoor pursuits, such as hiking and skiing.

In his early twenties, supported financially by his parents, Blackwood crossed the Atlantic Ocean and embarked on a life in Canada, where he found work in a plethora of roles, including teaching the violin, French and German, as well as shorthand, working as a cattle farmer, and as a hotelier, amongst other things. Unsettled, Blackwood then travelled to New York and soon found work as a journalist. Staying in cheap lodgings and frequenting pawnbrokers, while at times taking morphine, Blackwood's time in America was financially precarious. Almost a decade after leaving England, Blackwood then returned to his country of birth, though his stay here was brief as he soon travelled to Europe.

Forming part of *The Listener and Other Stories* (1907), a collection of the writer's works, *The Willows* is one of Blackwood's most well-known stories. An enthusiastic and appreciative reader of Blackwood, H.P. Lovecraft cited *The Willows* as one of the finest supernatural tales of English literature. As part of his *The Lost Valley and Other Stories* (1910) collection, another of Blackwood's most notable works is the horror novella *The Wendigo*.

Having long held an interest in literature, bringing into written form his deepening interest in spirituality and esoterism, it was around this time (1906) when Blackwood's first collection of short stories, *The Empty House and Other Ghost Stories* was published. Then, in 1907, a follow up collection of his works, *The Listener and Other Stories*, was published. In 1908, Blackwood's series of short stories on John Silence were published in a single book, *John Silence, Physician Extraordinary*. This publication featured five John Silence stories, a sixth John Silence story (*A Victim of Higher Space*) was later released as part of Blackwood's subsequent collected works (*Day and Night Stories*, published in 1917). Exploring some of his own fascinations and beliefs, in his John Silence character, Blackwood creates a protagonist whose

sense of self fuses interests of the supernatural and mysticism with professional medical training.

**Algernon Blackwood's John Silence stories**

A Psychical Invasion (John Silence, Physician Extraordinary, 1908)

Ancient Sorceries (John Silence, Physician Extraordinary, 1908)

The Nemesis of Fire (John Silence, Physician Extraordinary, 1908)

Secret Worship (John Silence, Physician Extraordinary, 1908)

The Camp of the Dog (John Silence, Physician Extraordinary, 1908)

A Victim of Higher Space (Day and Night Stories, 1917)

In 1909, Blackwood's first novel, *Jimbo: A Fantasy*, was published. Later that year, Blackwood's second novel, *The Education of Uncle Paul*, was published. Prolific in his literary output, two further novels followed in consecutive years, *The Human Chord* (1910), and *The Centaur* (1911). Blackwood's quick pace of writing continued over the years that followed as the writer produced numerous novels and short stories, as well as working on several plays.

*“Small things testified to this amazing influence of the place, and now in the silence round the fire they allowed themselves to be noted by the mind. The very atmosphere had proved itself a magnifying medium to distort every indication: the otter rolling in the current, the hurrying boatman making signs, the shifting willows, one and all had been robbed of its natural character, and revealed in something of its other aspect – as it existed across the border in that other region.”*

Taken from *The Willows* by Algernon Blackwood, first published in 1907.



## **The Willows**

The Willows is one of Algernon Blackwood's most well-known stories. It is a superb example of the writer's ability to create mounting tension with underlying supernatural menace.

Within the opening lines of The Willows' opening paragraph, Blackwood creates an atmosphere of enticement and foreboding as he blends his knowledge of European geography with poetic vigour, "the Danube enters a region of singular loneliness and desolation, where its waters spread away on all sides regardless of a main channel, and the country becomes a swamp for miles upon miles... "

Highly descriptive and with a poetic use of language, Blackwood describes the course of the Danube river and the surrounding vegetation, of which the willows transform the scene into moving plain of "bewildering beauty."

As two friends journey the river in a Canadian canoe, the surroundings of their travels are noted as they enter into a section of habitation which inspires thoughts of untrodden lands that possess an otherworldly quality, "The sense of remoteness from the world of humankind, the utter isolation, the fascination of this singular world of willows, winds, and waters." The intrepid duo then rest for the evening, allowing the story's narrator to reflect on the surroundings and the journey so far.

It is during their time of attempted rest that the travellers experience the full horror of the willows as it dawns on them that they have entered into a location in which fabrics of natural and supernatural existences have merged, "on the frontier of another world, an alien world, a world tenanted by willows only and the souls of willows."



### **The Empty House and Other Ghost Stories**

Comprising ten short stories, *The Empty House and Other Ghost Stories* was published by Eveleigh Nash in 1906. The following year, Eveleigh Nash published the second of Algernon Blackwood's collected short stories, *The Listener and Other Stories*.

The Empty House

A Haunted Island

A Case of Eavesdropping

Keeping his Promise

With Intent to Steal

The Wood of the Dead

Smith: An Episode in a Lodging-House

A Suspicious Gift

The Strange Adventures of a Private Secretary in New York

Skeleton Lake: An Episode in Camp

### **The Listener and Other Stories**

The Listener

Max Hensig – Bacteriologist and Murderer

The Willows

The Insanity of Jones

The Dance of Death

The Old Man of Visions

May Day Eve

Miss Slumbubble – and Claustrophobia

The Woman's Ghost Story

At the outbreak of World War I, Blackwood was in his mid-forties. Considered too old for active service, he instead volunteered as an ambulance worker. He was later trained as a spy and operated in this role for several months. Furthermore, he also worked in an administrative role for the Red Cross. Following the ending of World War I and a return to a more settled life, Blackwood's autobiography, *Episodes Before Thirty*, was published in 1923.

In the mid-1930's, recognised as a renowned teller of foreboding ghost tales, Blackwood began to make regular appearances on BBC radio. Later, Blackwood became a regular fixture on the BBC television programme *Saturday Night Story*.

Originally set up to publish H.P. Lovecraft's works following the writer's untimely death, August Derleth co-founded the publishing house Arkham House. Expanding on the number of writers covered, in 1946 Arkham House published *The Doll and One Other* by Algernon Blackwood. Featuring two of Blackwood's previously unpublished novelettes, *The Doll*, and *The Trod*, *The Doll and One Other* had an initial print run of just under three and a half thousand hardback copies.

Over the course of a most interesting life, in addition to authoring many novels, short stories, plays, newspaper articles, and even children's books, Blackwood also worked as a farmer, hotelier, bartender, model, violin teacher, and spy. Following a period of ill health, aged eighty-two years old, Blackwood died on December 10, 1951. His ashes were later scattered on a section of the Swiss Alps, an area of the world which Blackwood had held especially close to his heart.

*"...the major products of Mr. Blackwood attain a genuinely classic level, and evoke as does nothing else in literature an awed and convinced sense of the immanence of strange spiritual spheres or entities."*

H.P. Lovecraft on Algernon Blackwood.



## Mervyn Peake

Hailing from the tropical island of Madagascar, receiving his education via the English missionary structure, followed by his graduation from Edinburgh University, where he studied medicine, Ernest Cromwell Peake worked as a medical missionary in China from 1899 – 1922. In becoming a missionary, he was following in the footsteps of his parents, Phillip George Peake and his wife Emilia Charlotte Scheiterberg. It was soon after his arrival in China that the young missionary met his future wife, a young woman of Welsh descent called Amanda Elizabeth Powell; the two wed in 1903. The couple later had two sons, Ernest Leslie Peake and Mervyn Laurence Peake.

Mervyn Laurence Peake was born in Kuling, Jiujiang, Qing China, on July 9, 1911. Born just a few months ahead of the revolution which gave birth to the Republic of China, Peake spent his formative years growing up in China, before leaving the county for Britain as his parents relocated to England when he was around eleven years old. Prior to leaving China, Peake attended Tientsin Grammar School. Upon the family moving to England, Peake attended Eltham College, a private day school in Mottingham, London. His time here was followed by the Croydon School of Art, then the Royal Academy of Arts.

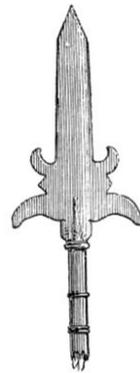
Often working in oils, Peake was a highly gifted painter. His work was exhibited in London, as well as in the Channel Island of Sark, with Peake spending time living in both locations. As well as working as a professional artist, Peake also taught life drawing at Westminster School of Art. It was during this time when Peake met fellow painter Maeve Gilmore, the two were soon engaged, then wed in 1937. The couple later had three children together, these being Sebastian, Fabian, and Clare.

In addition to painting and illustrating, Peake also spent time writing poems and stories, indeed one of his earliest literary works was a story called *The White Chief of the Unzimbooboo Kaffirs*, which he wrote before he left China. In 1939, Peake's first book, a children's story called *Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor*, was published via *Country Life*. Both written and illustrated by Peake, *Captain*

Slaughterboard Drops Anchor is centred around the adventures of Captain Slaughterboard and his ship The Black Tiger. The following year, complete with illustrations by Peake, Ride a Cock Horse and Other Nursery Rhymes was published by Chatto & Windus. Over the course of his career, Peake would write and illustrate, or sometimes just illustrate, a number of children's books.

Upon the outbreak of World War II, following unsuccessful attempts to be accepted as a war artist, Peake was conscripted into the British Army; serving with the Royal Artillery, followed by the Royal Engineers. In spring of 1942, Peake suffered a nervous breakdown. Following time recovering at Southport Hospital, Peake spent some months working on propaganda imagery for the Ministry of Information. Soon afterwards, Peake was invalided out of the Army. He then began working for the War Artists' Advisory Committee. In addition to his 'war works', both writing and illustrating the book, Peake's Rhymes Without Reason, was published by Eyre & Spottiswoode in 1944.

In 1945, through his association with the magazine's editor, Charles Fenby, Peake provided his artistic services to Leader, a weekly current affairs publication. Joined by journalist Tom Pocock, Peake travelled to Germany, to report on immediate post-war events. As part of the visit, Peake was present at the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen Nazi concentration camp; sketching scenes of the former prisoners, many of whom were on their deathbeds. A few months later, Peake met and sketched Peter Back, a tailor and Nazi party leader; one of three men condemned to death for the killing of an unarmed U.S. airman who had parachuted onto German soil. Peake met the criminal hours before he was hanged. It is believed that Peake's Titus Groan character Steerpike was influenced by these visits.



*"This tower, patched unevenly with black ivy, arose like a mutilated finger from among the fists of knuckled masonry and pointed blasphemously at heaven."*

Taken from Titus Groan, first published in 1946.

The series of works for which he would become most well-known, the first in Peake's trilogy of Gormenghast books, *Titus Groan*, was published in 1946. Wonderfully descriptive, with a twisting and compelling storyline, *Titus Groan* is a gothic-fused fantasy which tells of the ancient Groan family. Led by the book-obsessed, responsibility-burdened, seventy-sixth Earl of Groan, Lord Sepulchrave, the Groan family inhabits the sprawling and towering, crumbling and decaying, Castle Gormenghast. This castle serves as the backdrop to the book's many different characters, as power struggles and nefarious plans play out.

Two years after the release of *Titus Groan*, in 1948, another of Peake's children's books, *Letters from a Lost Uncle*, was published by Peake's regular publishing house Eyre & Spottiswoode. The book details the letters from an uncle to his nephew, describing his adventurous exploits with his assistant, a humanoid-turtle called Jackson, as they traverse the polar regions in search of a white lion. As well as writing the story, Peake also illustrated the work.

#### **Gormenghast adaptations**

Over the years, there have been a number of radio, television, and theatrical adaptations of Peake's Gormenghast works. Of particular note is Brian Sibley's radio adaptation which aired on BBC Radio in 1984. With Sting, himself a longtime reader of Peake's and particular fan of the writer's Gormenghast works, playing the role of Steerpike, this adaptation has been rerun a number of times since its initial broadcast.

As well as continuing to write his own stories, Peake provided illustrations for a number of books by a range of other authors. These projects included, among others, *Household Tales* by The Brothers Grimm (1946), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1946), and two of Robert Louis Stevenson's stories, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1948), and *Treasure Island* (1949). Furthermore, published by The Grey Walls Press, comprising dozens of Peake's drawings (featuring a range of mediums, including pencil, pen, charcoal, pastel, and more), *Drawings by Mervyn Peake* was released in 1949. Further books of Peake's artwork followed over the years.

## **Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast series**

London-based publishing house Eyre & Spottiswoode originally published Peake's Gormenghast trilogy of novels, *Titus Groan* (1946), *Gormenghast* (1950), and *Titus Alone* (1959).

### **Titus Groan**

*Titus Groan* is the first title in what is commonly referred to as Peake's 'Gormenghast series'. Set in the sprawling castle of Gormenghast, with the birth of the book's title character, the seventy-seventh Earl of Gormenghast, spurring a series of surrounding events, *Titus Groan* tells a gothic tale of ambition and treachery.

A master of language and superb conjurer of evocative names, in *Titus Groan* Peake describes with Dickensian-like zeal characters such as Rottcodd, Lord Sepulchrave, Fuchsia Groan, Mr Flay, Abiatha Swelter, Steerpike, Sourdust, and Doctor Alfred Prunesquallor.

### **Gormenghast**

While *Titus Groan* details the birth of Titus Groan, *Gormenghast* chronicles his early childhood through to his teens. Eager to free himself of his surroundings and the burden of his position, inspired by his foster sister, 'The Thing', Titus removes himself from the castle of Gormenghast to search for a life past the Gormenghast Mountain.

### **Titus Alone**

Underlined with menace and shades of dystopia, *Titus Alone* sees Titus Groan journey far from Gormenghast Castle as he navigates a river and enters into a modern landscape. Now far away from the castle and his responsibilities as earl, Titus lives within a dark city awash with pioneering technology. Torn by the pangs of responsibilities linked to his earldom, Titus nevertheless continues in his wanderlust.



### **Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast series (continued)**

Though his Gormenghast series of books is generally considered a trilogy, Mervyn Peake did also write (or partially write) two other Gormenghast-linked books, these being *Boy in Darkness*, and *Titus Awakes*.

#### **Boy in Darkness**

First published alongside stories by William Golding and John Wyndham, appearing in Eyre & Spottiswoode's 1956 anthology, *Sometime, Never: Three Tales of Imagination*, *Boy in Darkness* sees 'the boy' (Titus Groan) escape the confinements of his castle home and explore the weird outside world.

#### **Titus Awakes**

Peake had intended this novel to be the fourth in his Gormenghast series, however illness prevented its completion. Some years following his death in 1968, Peake's widow Maeve wrote a version of this story, which she titled *Search Without End*. Then, in 2011, based on a recovered notebook of Maeve's, which details further the wanderings of Titus Groan, *Titus Awakes: The Lost Book of Gormenghast* was published by Vintage (U.K.) and Overlook Press (U.S.A.), respectively.

Authoring fiction for both children and adults, Peake was a prolific writer. The follow-up to *Titus Groan*, Peake's Gormenghast novel was published in 1950. While *Titus Groan* introduced the character of Titus Groan, the seventy-seventh Earl of Groan is in the background. With *Gormenghast*, the character of Titus Groan very much comes to the forefront of things, as his progress to teenage years is detailed. *Gormenghast* also sees the further development of the nefarious Steerpike, as well as his ultimate downfall. Meanwhile, other characters, such as Titus Groan's foster sister, 'The Thing', play important parts of the story also.

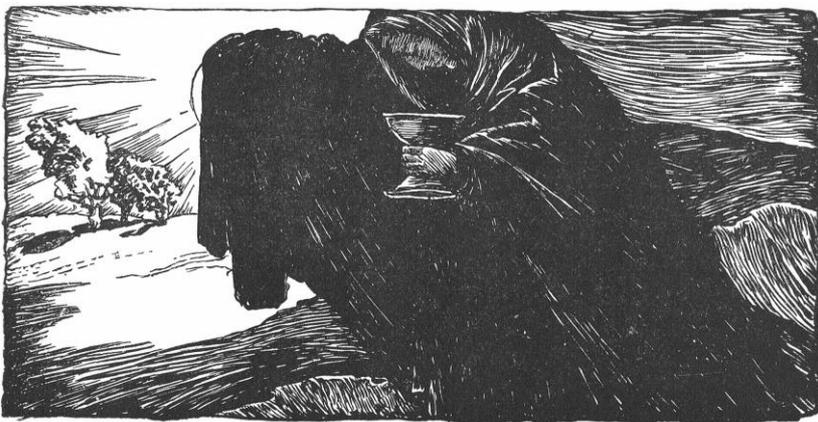


Often looking to incorporate his drawings into his works, Peake wrote a number of books for children during his lifetime. Published in 1953 by the London publishing house Heinemann, *Mr. Pye* tells the tale of the book's title character journeying to the Channel Island of Sark; here he advocates good deeds, before switching to acts of malice and being chased off the island. Like many of Peake's books, *Mr. Pye* has been republished over the years since its initial release. Furthermore, much like Peake's *Gormenghast* works, *Mr. Pye* has also been adapted a number of times for radio and television.



Concluding his *Gormenghast* trilogy of books, taking the character of Titus Groan outside of the confines of Castle Gormenghast, as he explores wider lands and more technologically advanced settings, *Titus Alone* was published in 1959. A few years later, in 1962, one of his last books to be published during his lifetime, written in 1947, complete with his own illustrations, Peake's epic poem *The Rhyme of the Flying Bomb* was published in 1962.

In his later years, Peake began to suffer with dementia, for which he was initially treated with electroconvulsive therapy. As his condition worsened, he entered into a care home near Oxford. It was here, on November 17, 1968, that Peake died, aged fifty seven years old. Shortly after her husband's passing, Peake's widow Maeve saw the publication of *A World Away: A Memoir of Mervyn Peake*. Maeve's touching and detailed tribute to her husband also includes a preface by fantasy author Michael Moorcock.



## Lord Dunsany

Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18<sup>th</sup> Baron Dunsany, better known simply as Lord Dunsany, was born in London, on July 24, 1878. Firstborn of John William Plunkett, 17<sup>th</sup> Baron Dunsany and his wife Ernle Elizabeth Louisa Maria Grosvenor Ernle-Erle-Drax Burton, Dunsany was born into great wealth and privilege.

Surrounded by opulence, Dunsany grew up in various large family homes, which included locations such as Dunstall Priory in Kent, England, as well as Dunsany Castle in Ireland. Further to this, Dunsany also spent time in London, England, at another of the family's many homes. Meanwhile, in line with the high social standing of his family, Dunsany received a private education, attending Eton College, followed by the Royal Military College of Sandhurst. It was during his early education that Dunsany discovered ancient Greek history and literature, something which sparked his imagination and later served as a key influence in many of his writings. As well as absorbing himself in the history of ancient cultures and civilisations, studying texts and various mythologies, Dunsany also enjoyed works by writers such as William Morris and Edgar Allan Poe.

Spanning the late-1890's through to the early-1900's, the Second Boer War took place in South Africa, as the British Empire fought with the Boer republics. During this conflict, Dunsany served in the Coldstream Guards as a second lieutenant. Then, in 1904, Dunsany married his fiancée Lady Beatrice Child Villiers. Two years later, Lady Beatrice gave birth to the couple's son, Randal.

Published by Elkin Mathews in 1905, Dunsany's first book was *The Gods of Pegana*. Illustrated by S.H. Sime, an English artist for whom Dunsany came to hold a longstanding and successful association, *The Gods of Pegana* sees Dunsany detail fantastic tales of creation, borne of a pantheon of his created gods. A second edition of *The Gods of Pegana* was published by The Pegana Press in 1911, with various other editions following thereafter.



Lord Dunsany was a keen chess player, indeed, such was his enthusiasm, he created his own variant of the game, typically known as 'Dunsany's chess'. This version of the game sees the Black set comprising standard pieces, while the White set is made up entirely of thirty two pawns. The objective for the Black player is to take every White pawn, while the objective for the White player is to checkmate the Black player.

Published by William Heinemann in 1906, Dunsany's second book, *Time and the Gods*, sees the Anglo-Irish writer tell further tales of his created gods. As with *The Gods of Pegana*, *Time and the Gods* was illustrated by S.H. Sime, while this book was also re-issued various times in the years that followed its initial release.

Tapped into a rich vein of creativity, prolific in his writing, Dunsany's third book, *The Sword of Welleran and Other Stories*, was published by George Allen & Sons in 1908. As with Dunsany's two previous works, artist S.H. Sime served as the book's illustrator. Like his books before, and many which followed, due to popular demand, *The Sword of Welleran and Other Stories* was reissued in various formats in the years following its original release.

*"Dunsany loves to hint slyly and adroitly of monstrous things and incredible dooms, as one hints in a fairy tale. In The Book of Wonder we read of Hlo-hlo, the gigantic spider-idol which does not always stay at home; of what the Sphinx feared in the forest; of Slith, the thief who jumps over the edge of the world after seeing a certain light lit and knowing who lit it; of the anthropophagous Gibbelins, who inhabit an evil tower and guard a treasure; of the Gnoles, who live in the forest and from whom it is not well to steal; of the City of Never, and the eyes that watch in the Under Pits; and of kindred things of darkness."*

H.P. Lovecraft on Lord Dunsany.

Again collaborating with artist and friend S.H. Sime, along with publishing house George Allen & Sons, Dunsany's book of collected fantasy stories, *A Dreamer's Tales*, was released in 1910. Then, in 1912, holding with illustrator S.H. Sime, but electing this time to work with publisher William Heinemann, Dunsany's collection of fantastical short stories, *The Book of Wonder*, was released.

Upon the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Dunsany volunteered for military service. During this time, Dunsany held the position of captain within the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

### **The Gods of Pegana**

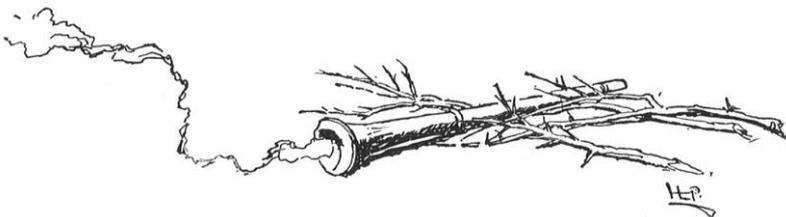
In *The Gods of Pegana*, Dunsany details a plethora of gods and mythical creatures that inhabit and watch over the lands of Pegana. The supreme deity of this esoteric world is MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI, creator of the other gods.

MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI is a powerful but fickle superbeing. In an effort to prevent him from destroying his creations, Skarl the Drummer, himself created by the greater god, constantly beats the skin of his drum as he looks to keep MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI in eternal slumber.

Written in an explanatory and detailed style, *The Gods of Pegana* reads as if comprising aspects of an alternative Bible, indeed, Dunsany later commented of the book that it was his attempt to give reasons for the oceans and moon.

*“Before there stood gods upon Olympus, or ever Allah was Allah, had wrought and rested MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI.”*

Taken from *The Gods of Pegana* by Lord Dunsany, first published in 1905.



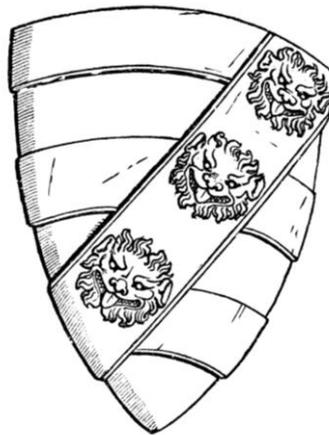
As well as writing stories and poetry, Dunsany also wrote theatre plays and radio plays, while some of his works have also been adapted for television.

In 1915, Dunsany's collection of short stories, *Fifty-One Tales*, was released on both sides of the Atlantic via publishing houses Elkin Mathews (U.K.) and Mitchell Kennerly (U.S.A.), respectively. The following year, released in 1916, another collection of Dunsany's fantastical short stories, *Tales of Wonder* (also known as *The Last Book of Wonder*), was published by Elkin Mathew (U.K.) and John W. Luce (U.S.A.), respectively.

*“Cursed be gnomes, trolls, elves and goblins on land, and all sprites of the water. And fauns be accursed and such as follow Pan. And all that dwell on the heath, being other than beast or men. Cursed be fairies and all tales told of them, and whatever enchants the meadows before the sun is up, and all fables of doubtful authority, and the legends that men hand down from unhallowed times.”*

Taken from *The King of Elfland's Daughter* by Lord Dunsany, first published in 1924.

Over the next few years, further Dunsany works were published; *Tales of War* (1918), *Unhappy Far-Off Things* (1919), *Tales of Three Hemispheres* (1919 (U.S.A.), 1920 (U.K.)), and *Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley* (also known as *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*) (1922). Then, in 1924, going on to become one of his most well-known and celebrated works, Dunsany's epic fantasy novel *The King of Elfland's Daughter* was published.



## Joseph Jorkens

Developed in the mid-1920's, Joseph Jorkens is one of Dunsany's most popular fictional characters. The first of Dunsany's Joseph Jorkens stories to be published was *The Tale of the Abu Laheeb*, which appeared in an issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine in 1926.

With a fictional gentlemen's club of London serving as the typical opening scene, from which a variety of adventures are then described by protagonist Joseph Jorkens, a bombastic, overweight, middle-aged character, Dunsany's 'Joseph Jorkens series' spanned more than a thirty year period.

*“A little more and it will be a habit with me to record the tales of Joseph Jorkens, so that men and women to whom the Billiards Club means nothing may come by scraps of knowledge of far corners of Earth, or tittle-tattle about odd customs of some of its queer folk, which otherwise would be lost with the anecdotes that were told only to help pass a dingy afternoon. And this tale I tell because he told it to me, and to half a dozen others, one winter's day at the Billiards Club between luncheon and nightfall.”*

Taken from *The Mermaid's Husband* by Lord Dunsany, first published in 1930.

Prolifically creative, several other Dunsany titles appeared over the following years, including, among others, *The Charwoman's Shadow* (1926), *The Blessing of Pan* (1927), *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933), and *My Talks With Dean Spanley* (1936).

Meanwhile, in 1929, via G.P. Putnam's Sons, Dunsany's first collection of poetry, *Fifty Poems*, was published. Many other collections of his poems followed over the years.



*"I dreamt that I went back to the hills I knew, whence on a clear day you can see the walls of Ilion and the plains of Roncesvalles. There used to be woods along the tops of those hills with clearings in them where the moonlight fell, and there when no one watched the fairies danced."*

Taken from *The Giant Poppy* by Lord Dunsany, first published in 1915.

Though in his elder years, Dunsany was still keen to contribute to the Allied efforts during World War II; Dunsany listed himself with both the Irish Army Reserve and the British Home Guard. Meanwhile, over the years that followed, though his writing became less frequent, Dunsany still saw the publication of various works, such as his fantasy short story collection *The Man Who Ate the Phoenix* (1949), as well as another collection of his short stories, *The Little Tales of Smethers and Other Stories* (1952).

Aged seventy-nine years old, Dunsany died on October 25, 1957. With his works influencing a swathe of other writers, such as H.P. Lovecraft, J.R.R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, Michael Moorcock, Arthur C. Clarke, and many others, Dunsany was a writer whose originality and creative zeal resulted in richly textured, highly detailed and fantastical works.

*"Inventor of a new mythology and weaver of surprising folklore, Lord Dunsany stands dedicated to a strange world of fantastic beauty, and pledged to eternal warfare against the coarseness and ugliness of diurnal reality. His point of view is the most truly cosmic of any held in the literature of any period."*

H.P. Lovecraft on Lord Dunsany.



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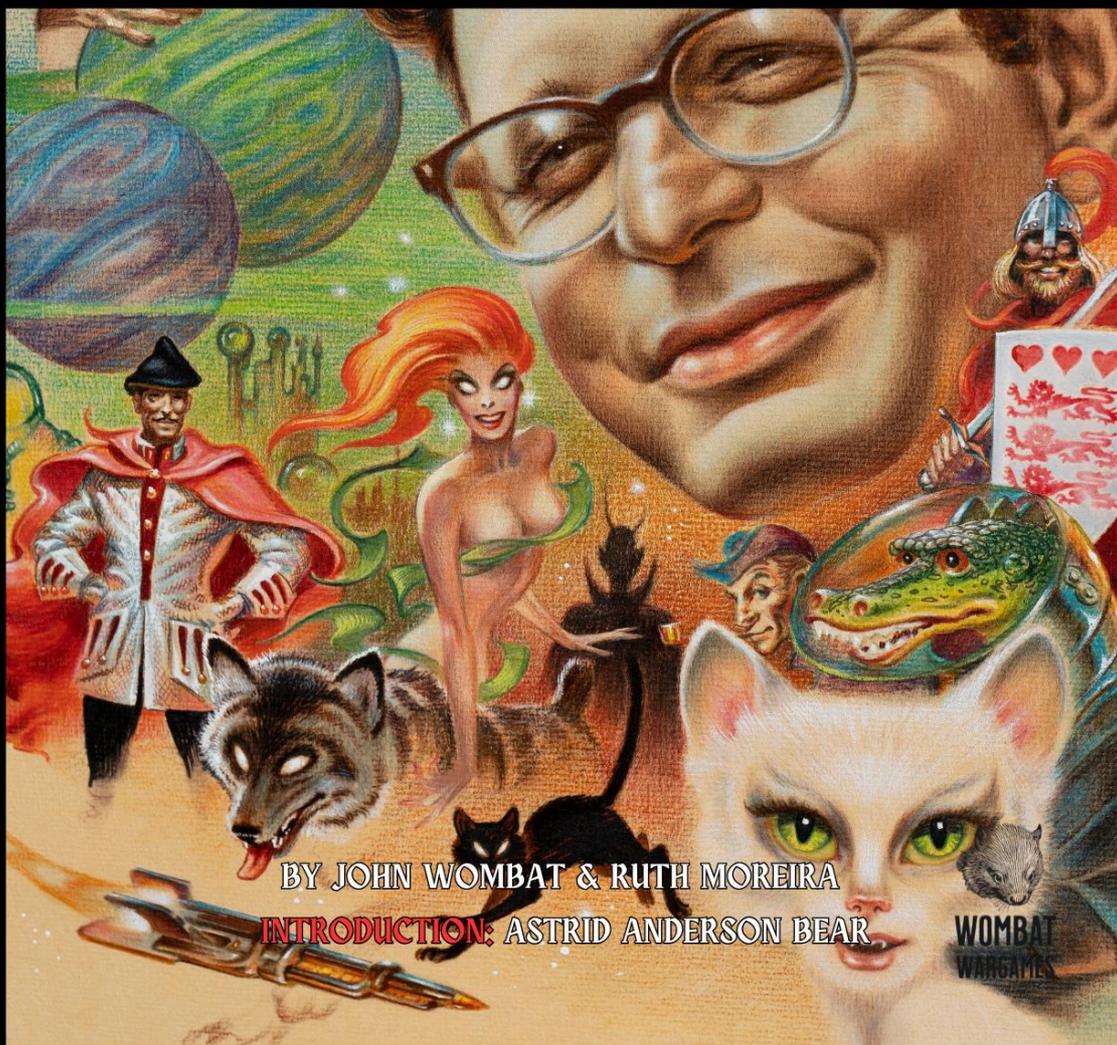
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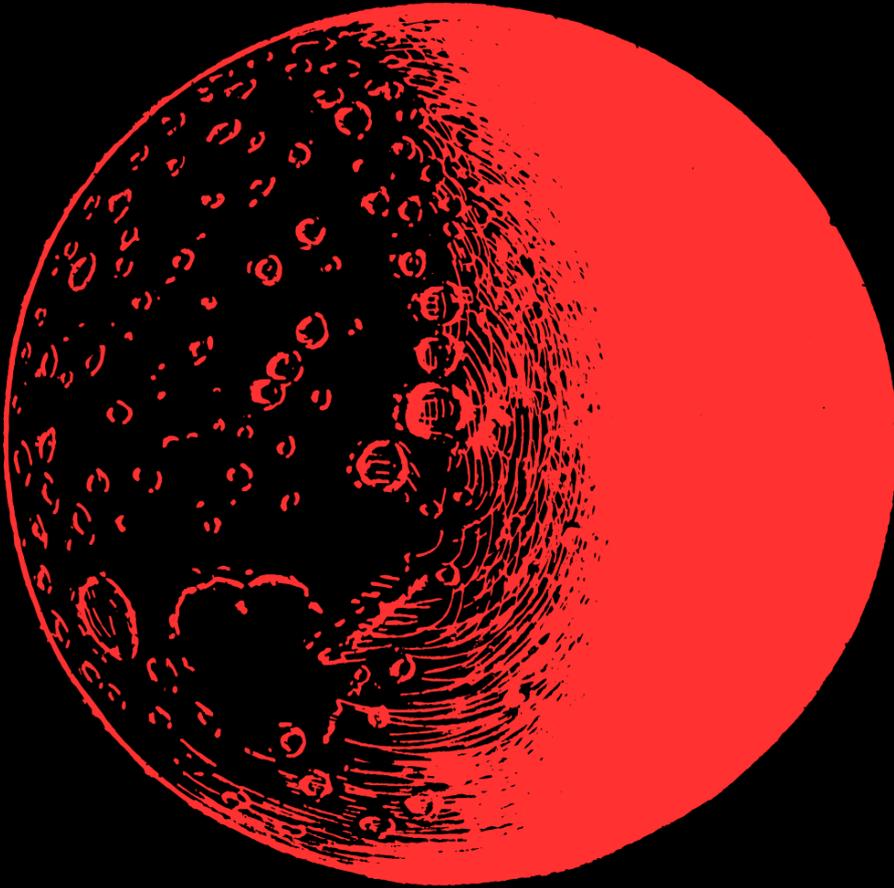
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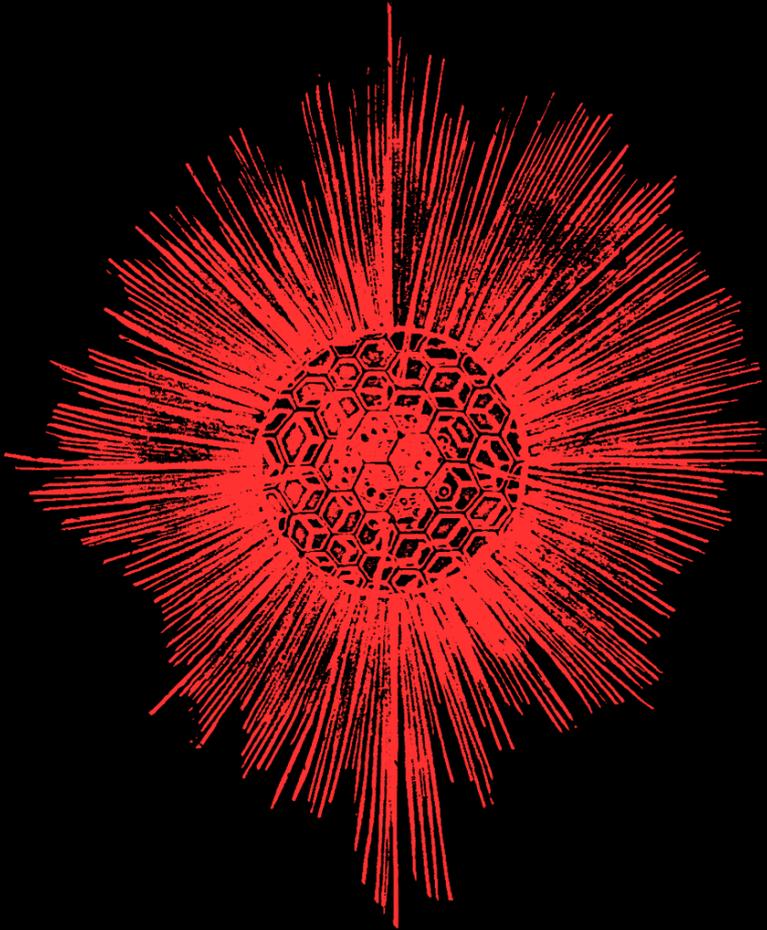
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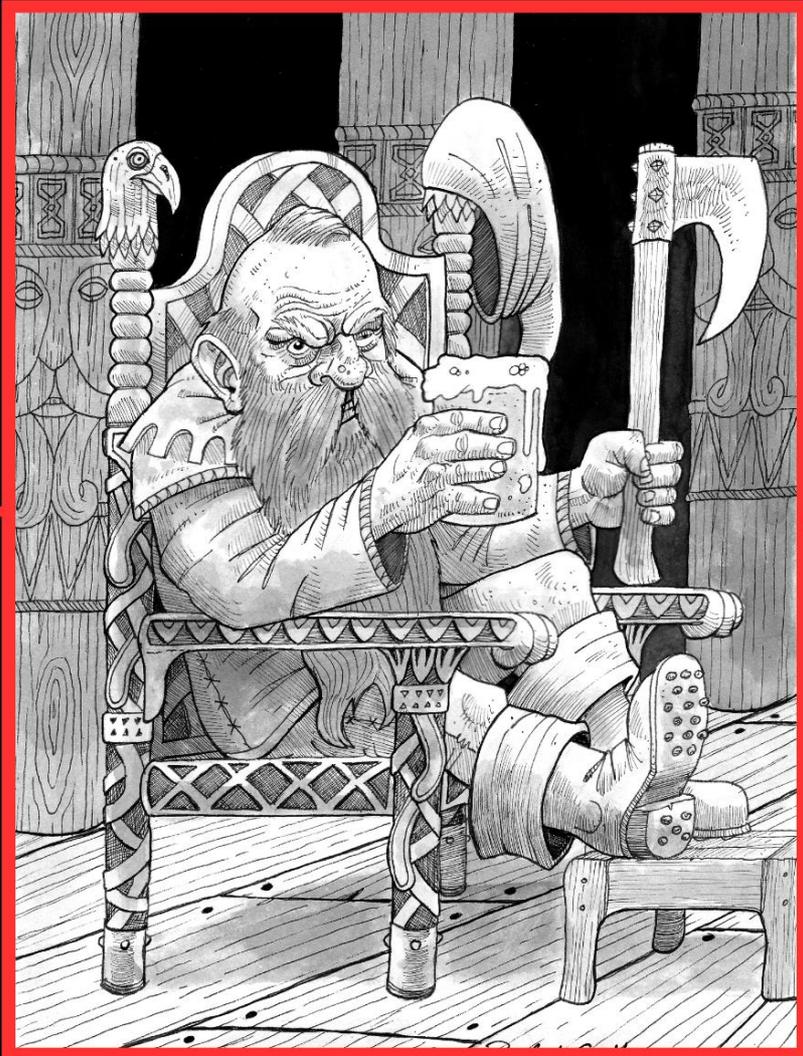
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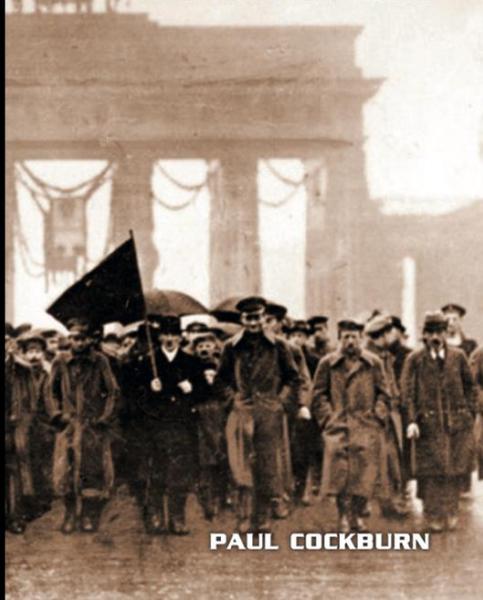
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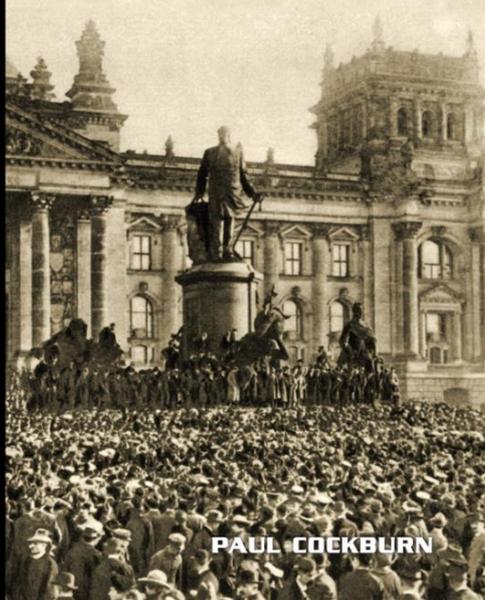
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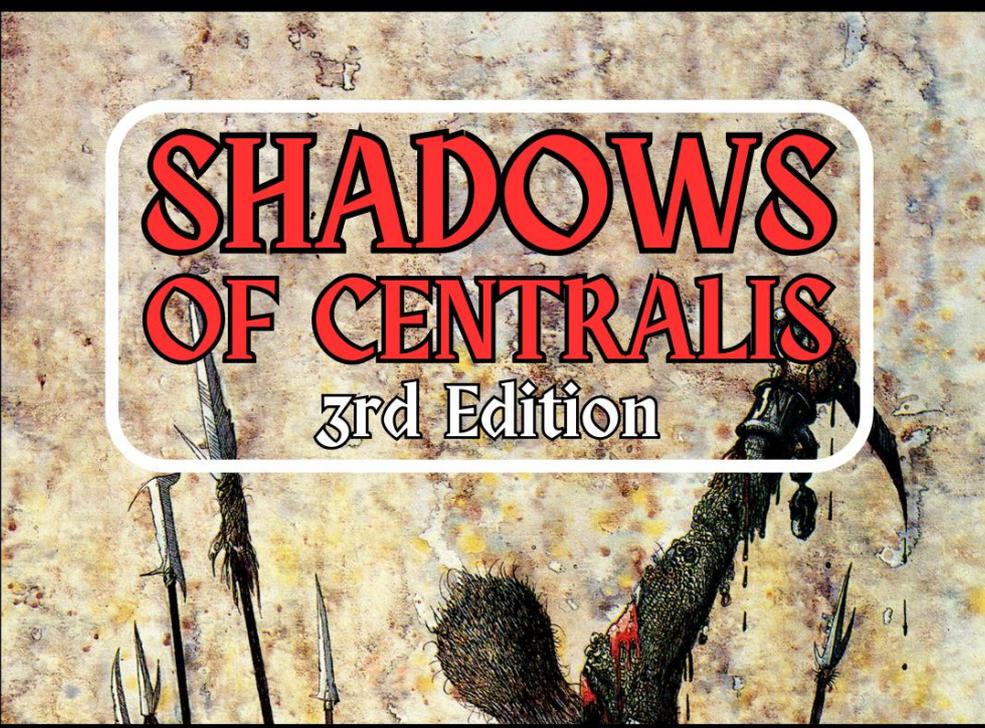
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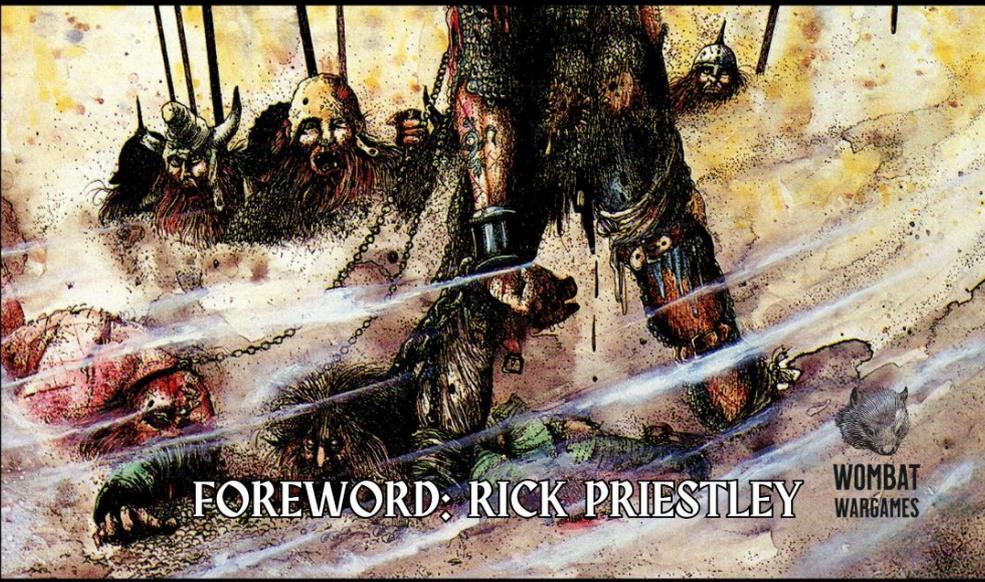
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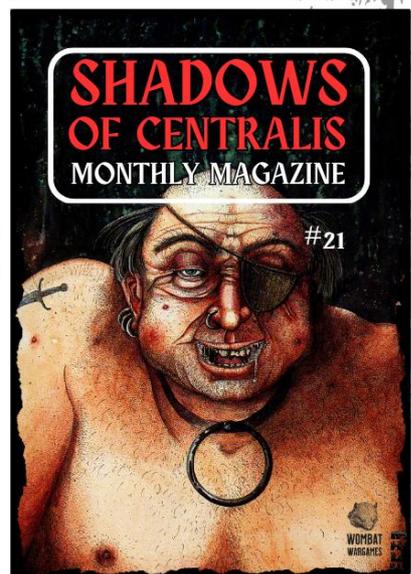
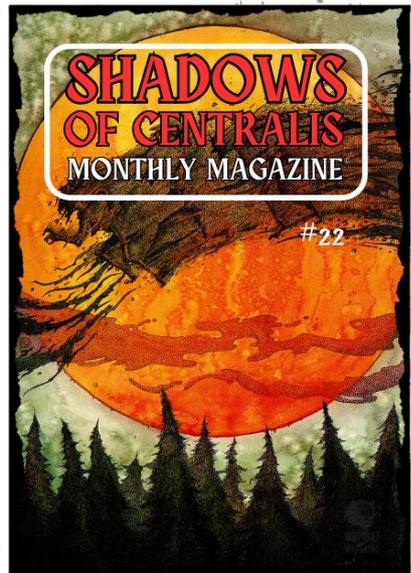
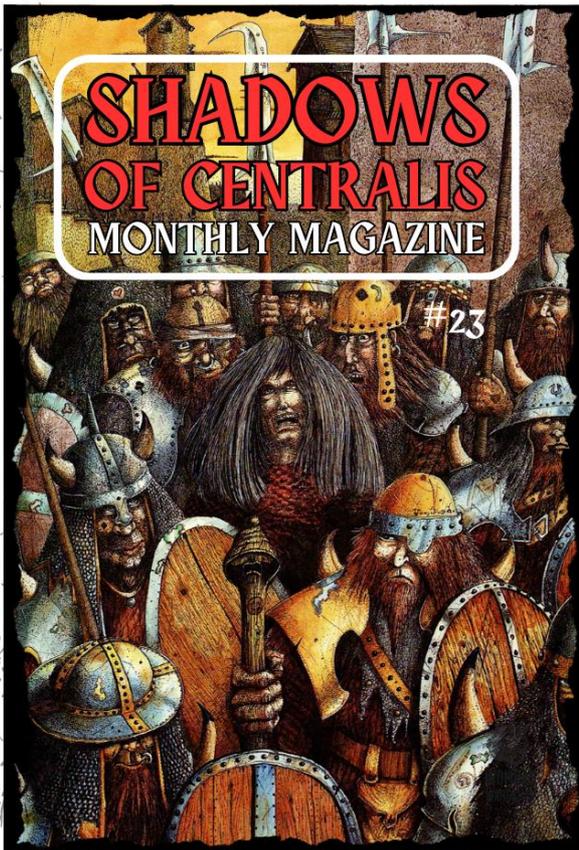


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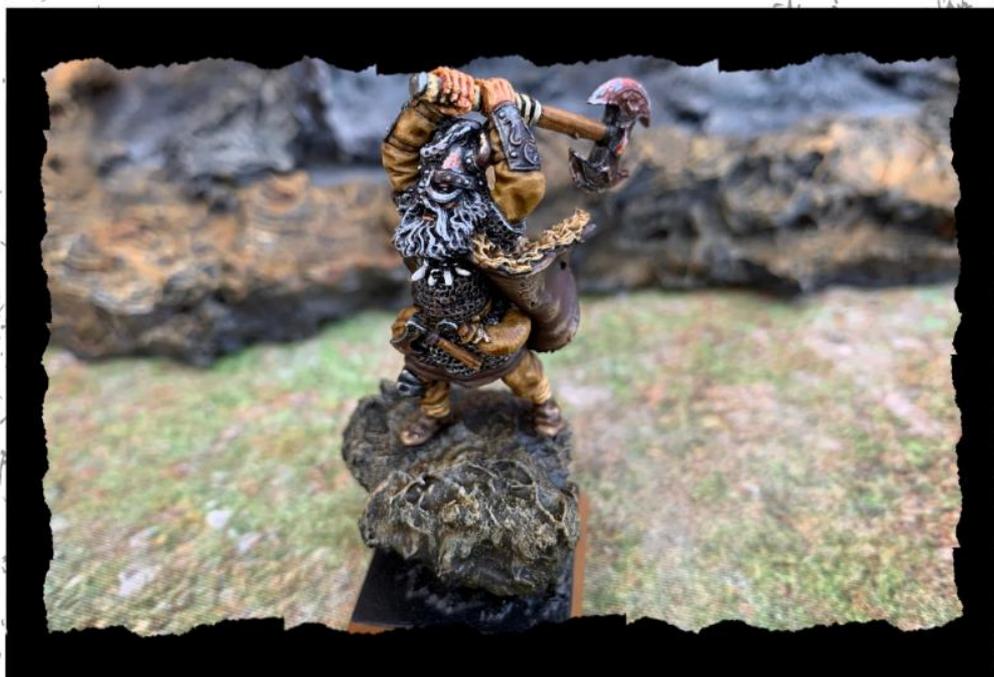


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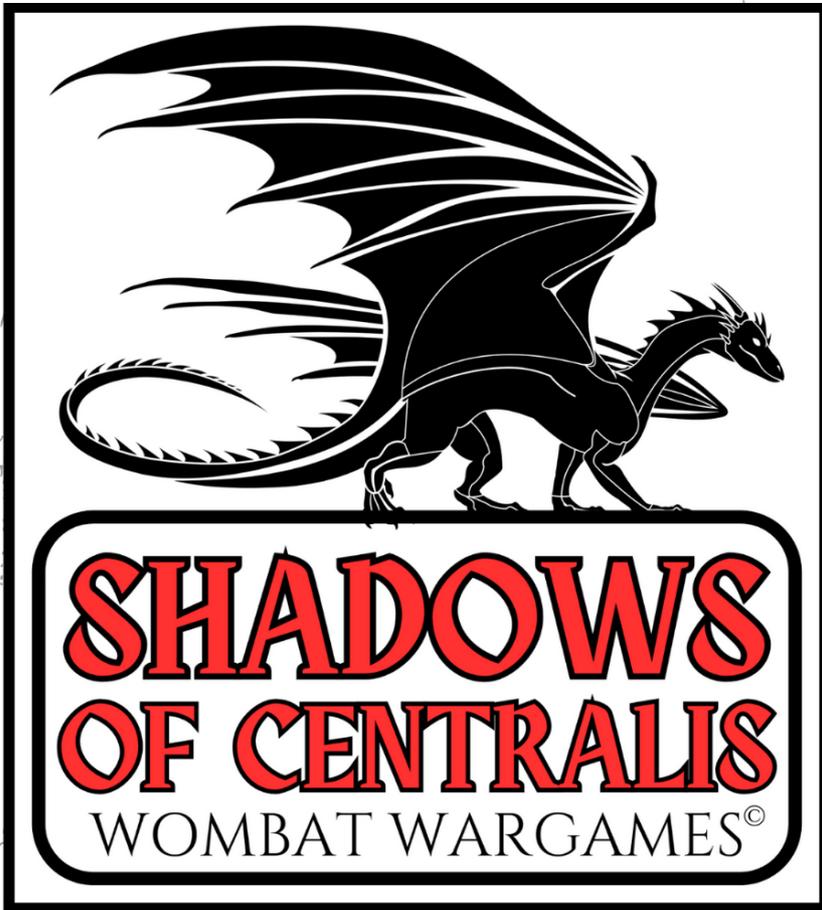
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